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# THE RISEN REDEEMER:

THE GOSPEL HISTORY FROM THE RESURRECTION  
TO THE DAY OF PENTECOST.

MAR 3 1995







# THE RISEN REDEEMER:

## THE GOSPEL HISTORY

FROM THE

Resurrection to the Day of Pentecost.

BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY JOHN T. BETTS,

With the Sanction of the Author.

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## PREFACE.

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THE bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead is the fundamental basis of Christianity. "If Christ be not risen from the dead," exclaims the apostle, "then is your faith vain." So long as the hostile critic does not succeed in effacing that fact as a fable from the page of history, all efforts to subvert the supernatural basis of our faith and hope are in vain; and however zealously the rash work of destruction has been prosecuted, it has, up to the present hour, been a failure. The miracle of the third day has resisted all levers and engines exerted against it by refined subtilty, as completely as if they were no more than the jugglery of a paltry legerdemain. This one miracle, well sustained, bears, supports, and accredits all the others to which the gospel bears testimony; and *it stands still*, and will continue to defy, every assault.

It is worthy of observation, that even David Strauss, the renowned chief of the most recent assailants of Heaven, finds himself constrained openly to admit, that the notion that the first disciples of Jesus, the apostles, were not themselves fully convinced of the truth of His bodily resurrection, is



## PREFACE.

utterly untenable, and must be given up. This declaration appears in his recently-published work upon the writings of his intellectual progenitor, Reimarus.

We attach importance to this confession of an arch enemy of all sacred history the rather, because the only and last shift by which he seeks to find an excuse for his infidelity is truly absurd; for he endeavours to persuade himself, and this undoubtedly in opposition to his better knowledge and conviction, that the disciples confounded a beautiful phantasy with a historical fact. Thus doth the Lord take the wise in their own craftiness, and, as we suggest, renders the cleverest men, ere they are aware of it, sport for children.

In the present work, the author, in his endeavour to promote edification, unites also an apologetic aim, and hopes, with the Divine blessing, to assist in strengthening the faith of the conscientious doubter by clearing away his difficulties in a sympathetic spirit. This work, published [in Germany] under the title of "The Easter Manual," forms, with his two preceding works, the book for the season of Advent, and that for Passion-week, a devotional trilogy, for these three ecclesiastical epochs. It will be gratifying to find this work as favourably received as the preceding ones. It treats of the loftiest and most delightful subject of contemplation that can occupy us here on earth. May the Spirit of the Lord seal the testimony as true to many a heart, however feeble the form in which it is presented!

DR F. W. KRUMMACHER.



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## I.

### EASTER-EVEN.

"IF Christ be not raised," exclaims the apostle, (1 Cor. xv. 17,) "your faith is vain." Truer words were never uttered than these, and never was their truth more distinctly and palpably manifested than in our own day. Human wisdom has exhausted itself in speculations, and has set every engine in motion to obtain a final settlement of the question, "To be, or not to be?" What has been the result? Our philosophic inquirers, wearied with their flights of thought, have ended in confessing that the prospect of a personal existence after death becomes more and more obscure to their investigations. There remains therefore the one, but (God be praised!) the far more than sufficient, pillar of our hope—that great historical fact, the memorial of which we celebrate at Easter. To this event, the most teeming with promise of any within the range of universal history, we would devote a fresh series of meditations, and may your heartfelt sympathies not fail us whilst we seek to lay them before you. Our purpose is restricted to the strengthening of your conviction of the reality of the great event, so as to render your faith immovable; and then to lead you on to the joyful and believing appropriation of this most consolatory of all miracles. May the Lord graciously give me success in both attempts, and may He crown that of Easter-even, to which I now invite you, with His blessing!



MATT. xxvii. 62-66.

"Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead : so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch : go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch."

Be not dismayed when you see the Lord of glory treated as a malefactor even at the grave. What His enemies there dared to attempt turns out, under God's guidance, only to His own glorification. It is a guard of honour with which they unwillingly surround His resting-place. They are actually constructing Him a throne, whilst they purpose only to erect a pillory on which to disgrace Him publicly, and to brand Him as a deceiver. They design to perpetuate Good Friday, and they underlay the glory of Easter with a foil upon which it develops itself the more brilliantly. Let us in thought draw nearer to this extraordinary scene. After contemplating the involuntary celebration of Easter-eve by His adversaries, let us with very different sentiments perform its proper celebration at the holy sepulchre, which may God bless !

I. The soul-deserted body of the Lord has rested the first night in its narrow stone chamber, but His murderers, the members of the Sanhedrim, have not. We already meet them at early dawn moving about restlessly, and the expression of their features betokens anything rather than triumph and inward peace. Have they seen a departed spirit in the night? Yes ; wherever they go or stay He whom bodily they slew on the cross presents Himself, and follows them like a spectre. They have murdered Him, but they have not got rid of Him. They are fully conscious that they have dragged



an innocent, guiltless man to execution, but the awakened conscience is not to be lulled with lying subterfuges, as if He had attacked Moses, had reviled the temple, and had led the people astray. What they witnessed at Golgotha, the glorious termination of the righteous One's career, the public confession of the heathen centurion, and especially the manifestation of the Almighty by the darkened sun, the earthquake, and the opening of the graves, served but to render them more sensitive to the lashes of that scourge which the judge within their breast incessantly inflicted on them. What marvel then if the Crucified One, in the form of a bloody spectre, was ever present to them, chasing away sleep from their eyes? Assuredly there is not a man amongst us who has decidedly rejected Christ that can ever wholly banish Him. Such a one, though he decline to confess it, lives ever in a secret feud with his conscious inner life. The soul within him cannot avoid recognising the superhuman exaltation of Jesus, and at the same time His just claim to the homage and subjection of all. However earnestly he may combat and strive to silence this inner self, it will incessantly whisper, "Thou rejectest thy liege Lord and only Saviour." He hates the preaching about Christ, not because it is, as he pretends, senseless and superstitious, but because there is, as has been said, a something unconquerable within him, which, notwithstanding all his unbelief, believes, counsels, and prompts him to render the homage due, while the man rebels and will not consent that *He* should reign over him, who gives His followers and disciples to anticipate through life self-denial instead of enjoyment, and a cross instead of honour and renown.

But there was another heavy burden which weighed upon the high priests and scribes besides the ban and curse of conscience. It was a gloomy solicitude lest the crime which they had perpetrated on the Nazarene should after all,



through some new marvel, entail on them the brand of infamy, and cause them to be for ever pilloried in history. True it is, they did not verbally express as much, but their tone was as if they feared that some feigned miracle invented by the followers of the murdered man should prove prejudicial to them. They recollected perfectly well that Jesus had expressly and repeatedly intimated that He should die by murderous hands, but that on the third day He should rise again. Hypocritically concealing their real anxiety, they say amongst themselves, "What if the disciples of the Galilean should conceive the purpose of secretly bearing away the body from its tomb, and then persuade the people that their Master had come to life again? What would the effect of this be upon us? Every precaution must be used to prevent such a fraud as this." And they all concur in this suggestion. But in what mode could they successfully prevent the disciples from following this course? They take counsel together, and their practised subtlety in all the arts of lying soon discovered the means.

I here observe, in passing, that several critics have questioned the historical truth of the whole story, because they did not see how it could be possible that such members of the high council as a Nicodemus, a Joseph of Arimathea, and a Gamaliel, should ever have yielded their assent to so malignant a scheme as the one there planned. And, indeed, I myself likewise have held this to be impossible. But, in the first place, we do not read that these transactions were resolved on in a regularly-convened, full assembly of the Sanhedrim, but, on the contrary, everything would seem to indicate rather a tumultuous meeting, not of the whole body, but of a part, and that indeed made up of the most malevolent members of the council. For, doubtless, the two first named, Nicodemus and Joseph, would, together with their public formal protest against the judicial murder, have



solemnly sent in their resignation as members, and would hence have no longer been present at the deliberations, or been cognisant of the subsequent projects of their former unrighteous associates. In this way the above-mentioned doubt is simply and easily cleared up, and it will be no less easily solved should it arise again in reference to a later transaction—I allude to the bribery of the guard appointed to watch the sepulchre.

The chief priests and elders repair to the governor. Notwithstanding the undoubtedly early hour, Pilate, who likewise had passed a sleepless night, granted them at once the desired audience. Upon his inquiry as to their prayer, they disclose their project, and say, with feigned loyalty, “Sir, we remember that *that* deceiver, of whose presence we, with your approval, have freed the country, while he was yet alive, expressly declared that he would, after three days, rise again.” Beloved, let us pay great attention to this speech of the elders of Israel. Jesus, then, really said that He would rise again on the third day. Let us take note of this testimony from His enemies and most bitter opponents. It must be of great importance to us to hear it attested and confirmed as a notorious fact, that our Lord really, and in the most unequivocal manner, announced beforehand the glorious issue of His martyrdom. The members of the Sanhedrim further say to Pilate, “Command therefore the sepulchre be made sure until after the third day, in order that his disciples may not come and steal the body, and subsequently say to the people, He is risen from the dead ; so the last error shall be much worse than the first.” Now, we have already learnt how to interpret this language, and to supply what is not expressed. They require the guard much less with reference to the disciples, than with relation to our Lord himself. Pilate willingly grants their prayer, for to him the assurance would be rather alarming that the man who, when standing before



his bar, so powerfully impressed him, should have spoken of His resurrection with such precision. "Take the guard," says the governor, (referring, as it appears, to his own body-guard;) and adds, "go, make the grave as sure as you can." And they did so. The guard is taken to Joseph's garden—it is placed before the sepulchre of the Crucified One—the stone which closes the tomb is sealed, in order that any violent opening of it may be punished as sacrilege; that is to say, as the violation of a sanctuary, which would subject the perpetrators to criminal proceedings.

You will now understand in what sense I characterised these precautionary measures of the enemies of Jesus as an involuntary preparation by them for the celebration of Easter. In the midst of their misgivings and apprehensions, Christ actually arose. After all that they had seen and experienced respecting Him, they would fain have withheld from themselves all conscious acknowledgment of what they really thought Him to be, as indeed the man who possibly might suddenly raise Himself alive again from His death-chamber. And thus, whilst wearing the hypocritical mask of resolute unbelief, they, through the powerful impressions which His own personality had graven into them, rendered Him involuntary homage as a hero possibly superior to the king of terrors, to death itself. They unwillingly paid homage to the Prince of Life. Let our preparation, however, for the feast be of a better character.

II. We enter Joseph's garden, and are seized with the tremor of a foreboding awe. There lies the holy sepulchre, surrounded by the armed watch. The stone door is firmly cemented and sealed. But what matters this? The firmer the bolts, the more conspicuously will it be shewn who broke them, and even here could make for Himself a free passage. The world has oftentimes seen the Lord Jesus imprisoned and immured in a spiritual sense. Imperial seals, as that of



Julian the Apostate ; philosophical seals, as that of Spinoza, and many others after him ; republican seals, which recall the formal abolition of Christianity at the time of the French Revolution ;—these made the dungeon, in which it was fondly thought Christ was shut up, to appear closed for ever, as if no power could possibly break it open. But ere they were aware, He, whom they thought had been got rid of for ever, burst all the prison-cells, as He has in our own days that of Rationalism, in which they insanely fancied Him entombed, and He now stands victor upon the arena, crowned both in the Church and in the seats of learning. Who can confine *Him* ?

There, in the dark vault, lies the body of the Lord of heaven, soulless ! Oh, what depth of humiliation ! But let us not overlook the bright torches which God has placed beside Him ; first of all, in the prophetic passage of Isaiah liii. 9, “ And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death ; ” and then that in the words of the royal Psalmist, “ Thou, Lord, wilt not suffer thy Holy One to see corruption, ” (Ps. xvi. 10.) And what do we read, with the eye of the spirit, on the stone which closes the entrance of His sepulchre ? His own fingers inscribed it, and it runs thus :—“ Verily, verily I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone ; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit, ” (John xii. 24.) Oh, do but wait, the great harvest-day is at hand !

The rocky tomb of our Lord would become a reef on which our entire faith in Providence would founder, if we regarded Christ's appearance here on earth as simply on His own account, and not rather as the head and representative of humanity. In that case He would never, as *expiator of sin*, have shared the lot of man even to death ; or we should, with Him, have seen the whole Divine administration sink likewise, and even God himself, as a Person and the righteous



Ruler together, annihilated and entombed for ever! But as His tomb now gives irresistible testimony to His mediatorial position, so it transforms the tombs of His people into stations whence they make their transition to new and more blissful spheres of life. For the path taken by the Head is necessarily that followed by the members; and that which the first Adam brought down to the dust with himself, the second restores in His own person out of the ruins. It is true that our flesh, corrupted by sin, is not saved from the transmuting process of decay. The Almighty has uttered His sentence with reference to us, "Dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return." But no less authoritative than the preceding is the following one, "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption." An atom, though invisible to mortal eye, is preserved by the Almighty as the germinal frame of our undying body, on which at some future day the Divine agency will be made manifest, by which He, as the Scriptures declare, "makes all things subject unto Himself."

The stone-vault before which we stand contains only the body of our Lord. Where is His spirit? We have heard Him give the dying thief the solemn assurance, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." In 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20, the apostle testifies that "after Christ had been *put to death in the flesh*,"—that is to say, in His humanity,—He was "quickened in the Spirit," and raised to a higher, less-restricted, and freer sphere, and that "*in this Spirit also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison, who sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing.*" In the Apostles' Creed we find the passage, "He *descended into hell*," following the word "*buried.*" This latter testimony manifestly refers to the above quotation from Peter; and not only so, but it is based upon it. Therefore the expression, "*hell*," is here used as synonymous with the



word "*prison*." But it is impossible that the latter can be identical with the "paradise" which is spoken of in 2 Cor. xii. 2-4, as being one and the same with "*the third heaven*." And again, paradise, though a sphere of bliss, appears to be different from that highest heaven where God is seen face to face, and which our Lord had in His eye when in His later testimony He says, "*I have not yet ascended to my Father*;" it is subordinate, or at least secondary, to this; and we must therefore conceive of a heavenly vestibule where the redeemed had to wait the real ascension into heaven, the bodily one, of their glorified Mediator, in order to enter with Him the open gates of the city of God, and to attain the full possession of their eternal inheritance. To this antechamber Christ in spirit, while His body remained in the tomb, led the penitent thief, and then presented Himself to preach to the spirits in prison. We are left utterly without intimation where this latter place is situated; but still it is not to be confounded with the abode of the damned. The great reformer, Calvin, thought he could avoid the descent into hell altogether, whilst he explained the passage in Peter thus:—Christ had exhorted Noah's contemporaries to repent, *whilst they were yet in the flesh*, through the Holy Ghost by Him imparted to Noah, the preacher of righteousness. This exposition, however, is too artificial to commend itself to an impartial mind. It is invalidated at once by the expression, "*He descended*," which cannot well betoken anything other than *local* motion, as it does afterwards in the 22d verse of the chapter alluded to. We have no intimation of the topics upon which He preached to the "spirits in prison," whether repentance, or His own triumph. But it may, however, well be presumed that amongst the souls that were hurried away by the flood, there were not a few who, if not converted, were nevertheless not far from the kingdom of God. Was the way to full regeneration now opened up to them? This is



conceivable. But under any circumstances, that descent of Christ in spirit was not associated with His state of humiliation, but already formed the transition to His state of exaltation: still less is it to be viewed as a complement of His mediatorial and propitiatory work, for this had seen its full accomplishment just prior to the moment when, commending His spirit into His Father's hands, He victoriously exclaimed, "*It is finished.*" But we should grasp at more than would become us, were we, from a fact of which Peter gives so mysterious an intimation, to deduce consequences which might to some extent paralyse the zeal with which we ought to strive, on this side eternity, to make preparation for heaven. A subject of consolation for the *heathen* to whom God's Word has never come on earth, may be drawn from this consideration, but certainly none for *us* who have the gospel.

Thus we have not to seek the Lord himself in His tomb, but only His human frame, His earthly pilgrim's-garment. He is traversing in the spirit other regions. Is His resurrection, therefore, nothing more than the reunion of the Son of God with His entombed body? Yes, it is so, only He reassumes this body in a *glorified* condition. It is true that it is difficult, nay impossible, for our short-sighted faculties to realise this representation. The bodily organisation destroyed by crucifixion must first be reinstated by creative power, and, beside this, be spiritualised as the organ of the God-man, who was now disconnected from the sublunary sphere of life. Indeed, this actually was accomplished, but the mode in which it was so remains an unsolved problem. I might here adduce something similar and analogous to the reunion of the spirit with the body previously deserted by Him. The condition of the clairvoyant, in whom all the bodily functions are suspended, as in death, whilst the mind for a season wanders as spectator and observer through distant scenes, and then returns in one moment to its deserted



body, might be adduced as one analogous to, and corresponding with, the reunion of His spirit with His previously deserted body. But let us be careful, lest we confound the natural and the supernatural with one another. The subject in question being the resurrection of Christ, we are in the province of *miracles*; and precisely as Scripture teaches that it is only "by faith that we understand the worlds were made by the word of God," so the miracle of the resurrection of our Lord, in all its parts, is given only to our faith.

The great day, however—the greatest which the world has seen—knocks at the stone door of the holy sepulchre. Now let us for a short time ponder over the Almighty's plan of redemption, as revealed by Moses and the prophets, in its connexion. From so elevated a point of view the resurrection of the Mediator will appear to us a *necessity*, imposing silence on all our doubts. After this day's preparation, we shall with childlike simplicity, and with unembarrassed, joyous hope, prepare ourselves for that immeasurably happier one which awaits us, and shall say with the Moravian poet:—

"Jesus, of all life the Lord,  
 Shall He in death decay?  
 Jesus, the Holy One of God,  
 Shall He corruption see?  
 Morning's fragrance!  
 Easter breeze!  
 E'en now I feel Thy gentle motion,  
 As w'll rise again! Amen."



## II.

## THE MIRACLE OF EASTER.

“EASTER is God’s Amen and the Hallelujah of humanity.” It is scarcely possible that the lofty significance of the glorious event to the close consideration of which we this day draw near, can be more strikingly indicated than by this well-known expression.\* This truth is sown broadcast throughout Scripture, and especially in the utterance of the apostle Peter, (Acts v. 30, 31,) where it is clearly attested, —“*This Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour,*”—that is to say, has publicly accredited and crowned Him as such. By the miracle of Easter the Almighty stamped an imperishable seal—one the splendour of which shone throughout the universe—upon the dignity, words, and work of His only-begotten Son, and uttered His “Yea” and “Amen,” confirmatory of the testimony of the Son that He was “the way, the truth, and the life,” and of His triumphant exclamation, “It is finished!” intelligibly to heaven, earth, and hell. Humanity finds that it has attained the object of its boldest expectations and longings. Infinitely more has been prepared for it, and secured to it, than it ever dared to hope. After its eternal redemption had been accomplished, it was then actually declared, by the authority of the Most High, to be perfected. There thence-

\* From the late Bishop Draesecke, of Magdeburg.



forth remained to the highly-favoured race of man nothing further than a never-ending hallelujah—"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think!"

In these few words we see hastily sketched those truths which will constitute for a season the green pastures in which the Good Shepherd will feed our souls. Isaiah predicted that "the redeemed of the Lord should come up to Zion with songs." This prediction is fulfilled since the announcement, "The Lord is risen," has resounded throughout the world. "He is really risen!" May it find a full echo in our hearts!

MATT. xxviii. 1-4, 11-15.

"In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men." . . . "Now, when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day."

"Shine, oh shine, thou Easter sun,  
 Deep into my heart;  
 Dissipate the heavy shades  
 Of its care and smart!  
 Shine with ray of purest light,  
 Flashing death's dark vale upon;  
 Brightly gild my soul's dark night—  
 Easter sun, shine on! shine on!"

This, beloved, is the key-note of the feelings with which I hail the great event, and which are called forth by the Gospel



just read. How few and how simple are the words in which it is conveyed to us. But they remind us of a fresco by a great artist, when, by a few bold and rapid strokes, to our astonishment we perceive the creation of an entire and animated painting. Yet no human art can compete with the divine truthfulness of colouring which here strikes the eye. We at once see that we stand on the sure basis of *historical fact*. Let us, with thoughtful spirits, approach still nearer to the most exalted and consolatory fact in the world's history, and consider the miracle, first, *in its historical details*; secondly, *as to its perfect credibility*; and lastly, *as to its high and glorious import*.

As a blessing upon our meditations, may the words of the Psalmist be fulfilled in us—"The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous: the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly, the right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly!" (Ps. cxviii. 15, 16.)

I. A beautiful Sunday morning here dawns, and scatters its pearls of dew on the springtide flowers. The world still lies in deep slumbers, never dreaming what a sun is about to rise upon the horizon of its life. But our Lord's disciples and friends have not closed their eyes throughout the night; they have passed it in weeping and lamentation, and partly in preparing to discharge the most painful service of love on their return to the garden, which they had left at the beginning of the Sabbath. In spirit we anticipate their arrival. A profound solemn stillness reigns all around, broken only by the tread of the guards as they pace backwards and forwards before the tomb of the crucified Prince of Peace. The second night since Good Friday has passed without any disturbance, apparently there is as little probability of a resurrection of the deceased as there is of an attack by the adherents and friends of the Crucified One. The



grave lies mute and closed before us ; its seal remains unbroken. It would seem that the reign of the pretended new King of Zion was gone by for ever. But what now ! On a sudden the earth begins to tremble—the rocks are rent asunder all around with fearful crash—superhuman forms, bright as lightning, and in garments white as snow, glide down from the heights of heaven to the garden. They are holy angels, like those who appeared at our Lord's nativity, and who came to minister to Him after His victory over the tempter in the desert. One of these gracious messengers approaches the tomb, touches the mass of rock which held it closed, and in a moment the seals are burst, the ponderous stone is rolled away, and from the opened portal of the grave there steps forth, radiant with heavenly glory, He who was dead !—and, behold, “He lives, and bears the keys both of hell and of death !” The guards, indeed, scarcely discern the Risen One. The dazzling robe of light which He wears hides Him from their bewildered sight. The only object they distinctly see is the seraph-form sitting in triumph on the rolled-away stone, as if it were a throne of state ; and then, with inexpressible consternation, trembling in every limb, they start up and hasten away to report to their superiors in Jerusalem the unheard-of prodigy that had occurred. Into what excitement the whole city would have been thrown by their report, had not the noiseless calm of early dawn rested on its deserted streets ! They only knock at the doors of the rulers, and we shall soon learn what was devised in that conclave to stifle the strange report in its birth. But the new life of the Risen One was mightier than all the craft and malignity of His adversaries, and escaped, as before from the grave, so now from the hold of falsehood within which they would fain have once more confined it. Though they contrived by the meanest expedient to stop the mouths of the *living* reporters, yet the *dead* arose as witnesses to the Easter



miracle. Many of the pious dead, through whose bodies a flash of returning life had thrilled at the moment when the powerful Victor's cry, "It is finished!" resounded from the cross, came forth from their graves with the Prince of Life, awakened by His death-subduing power, "and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many," (Matt. xxvii. 53.)

What do we say to this great and unique event? It must be understood that we employ here a different standard from that of our limited every-day experience, a higher one that stands above the earthly order of nature. We find ourselves in the domain of miracles. That which is here presented to our field of vision comes direct from the power and majesty of the Most High. From the earthquake, the rending of rocks, and the visit of angels, down to the appointed place in which, as the evangelist John reminds us, (John xxviii. 7,) the napkin and the linen clothes were seen, neatly wrapped together, in the empty tomb—all are the immediate working of the omnipotence of the personal and living God, whose pleasure it was that through these tokens His only-begotten Son should, after He had endured the ignominy of the cross, be honoured and glorified before the whole world. The greatest of all wonders, however, is the Risen One himself. Who can comprehend the change which suddenly had passed upon Him? Who can fathom the mystery of His glorified nature, of His new being? There He stands before us reunited to the body which, two days previously, He had left on the cross inanimate. It is the same body which we saw bleeding on the tree, and yet no longer the same. A spiritual change has likewise taken place in Him, of which His subsequent appearances do not permit us for one moment to doubt. Where He presents Himself, He does so as the result of a definite volition. Without this, His new nature would have been veiled to mortal eyes. After He had assumed a glorious body, He ate and drank, but He did not



to so from necessity, but, doubtless, in the same mysterious manner in which we saw Him, under the well-known title of "the Angel of the Lord," together with His attendant angels, eat in the grove at Mamre, when the Lord appeared to Abraham. Let no one now ask where the Risen One obtained the mantle with which He appeared invested at His exit from the tomb. This question remains an open one for our shortsighted understandings, like that of the snow-white garments of the angels. Hardly were they the product of a loom worked by man. Nor let us inquire where the Lord afterwards tarried when He did not manifest Himself to His disciples. We must ever remember that, after His resurrection, He had entered into the sphere of a higher nature, and, indeed, such an one that the earthly has nothing corresponding to place beside it. Moreover, the other matters connected with the Easter marvel, which, to our veiled eyes, appear enigmatical, will not embarrass or disturb us in the least, from the moment we hold the miracle itself to be, beyond all contradiction, a grand historical fact. That it is such a fact does not admit of one moment's doubt when viewed apart from all prejudice. We wish to convince all honest seekers for truth in the crowd of doubters around us, that Jesus Christ is really risen from the dead: but what effect do our arguments produce upon you? Calmly follow us in the discussion of the subject which we are prepared to enter upon with you, in order to elicit the truth, and then say what historical event was ever confirmed with more striking proofs than that of Christ's resurrection.

II. At Jerusalem, we find the high priests and elders already assembled before the first cock-crowing. The tidings brought by the watch have roused these terrified rulers from their beds like an alarm-trumpet. It is true they are not all assembled; Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and possibly some others like-minded, are absent. What measures



must be employed now? If the rumour of what happened to the watch be spread, the last error will be worse than the first, and the Galilean has triumphed even after death. Good advice is not at hand, and, in its stead, they adopt an expedient every way bad. As at the private audience on the Friday morning they meanly practised bribery, so now they employ the same means. The members of the council engage themselves to pay large sums of money to the guards upon their solemn promise to spread the report among the people, that during the night, and whilst they, the guards, were asleep, the disciples of the Nazarene came and stole away the body of their Master. But what if it should come to pass that the Dead should actually present Himself among the people? Well, even then, there remained this evasion, that He was only *apparently* dead when laid in the sepulchre, and that, by the employment of secret but effective means, He had been recalled to life. But what if the governor be informed of the bribery practised? The members of the council took upon themselves the responsibility of pacifying him on this head, and, moreover, engaged so to manage matters, that the guards should incur no punishment for their dastardly flight from the grave. Upon this, the guards took the wages of iniquity, and did as had been suggested to them. Since the Risen One did not again shew Himself to the people, the story of the robbery of the tomb was, as the evangelist says, "commonly reported among the Jews," and, indeed, Matthew adds, "until this day." We, however, may apply this expression to the present age, for not only do Jews, but with them there are likewise thousands of nominal Christians, who still concur in making the same "common report." But the thought that Christ is actually risen from the dead is indeed so great, and attended with such exceedingly happy results, that we incur danger, as did the apostles of old, in not believing "for joy." Nevertheless,



it is impossible to deny the event of Easter-tide, without at the same time flying in the face of all history; without accoutring one's-self in triple brass, to repel the most cogent proofs; without entirely renouncing all sound understanding; and without stifling and annihilating in one's-self the last sparks of susceptibility for historical truth. If it be certain that there ever lived a Roman emperor who bore the name of Augustus,—or that a people existed called the Jews, who, after they had crucified Christ, were scattered as chaff to the four winds of heaven,—or that, once upon a time, the Dagon of the Philistines fell before the ark of the covenant,—or that the gods of Greece and Rome were hurled from their altars before the gospel of the publicans, the fishermen, and the tentmakers,—we have still more conclusive evidence of that fact which, raised as it is immeasurably higher, above and beyond all doubt, the whole Church on earth is wont to celebrate at Easter with sound of trumpets and song—the *miracle* of the resurrection of Jesus.

First of all, survey with me the far-reaching chain of unequivocal predictions which, link within link, stretches through the four thousand years prior to the appearance of Christ. Or, will you dare deny that the ancient patriarchs of the human race, together with the entire Jewish nation, from their origin, placed their hopes on a Messiah who would bring salvation, peace, and redemption to them, and to the whole human race? Indeed, were you to do so, every Jew would enter the lists against you, and would reproach you as both blind and stupid. Open the sacred records of that people, and fix your eye upon the sublime form of the Saviour which will present itself to you in almost every page. Learn in those sacred writings how, when, and where “He who should come” was to appear. Behold Him in the representations of prophecy, as if He were already incarnate, walking, acting, doing, signs and wonders. Behold Him,



further, in that mirror, rejected by His own people, numbered among the transgressors, suffer, bleed, and die, and hear the prophet's explanation of it—"for our transgressions, for our iniquities." Observe, further, how in the great prophetic vision, after He has given up His life as a sacrifice, has been "taken from judgment," released from death, He is at length crowned with honour and glory, and raised to be the foundation and corner-stone of a new kingdom—the kingdom of grace; how He then "should prolong His days," and how "the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in His hands." Then take up the New Testament, and read first the four Gospels. What do you discover there? A man is born into the world at the precise time, at the fixed spot, and of the very family in which, according to prophecy, the Messiah should be born. This man, who thus appeared publicly, declares Himself to be "He of whom Moses and the prophets spake." He accomplishes all the works and wonders of the prophetic type. He corresponds in every feature with the Messiah of the Old Testament. He becomes the Lamb that bears the sin of the world. He says that He is fore-ordained to suffer and to die; that He shall not, however, remain in death, but shall rise again on the third day: and He suffers, sheds His blood, and dies, and—"does not rise again!" That were inconceivable, more so even than if the trunk of a sound tree, which is in the course of progressive development, should suddenly be arrested in its growth, and remain a stunted stem, without any head-growth or crown at all. The connexion of the prophecy and its fulfilment, as well as the gradually progressive course of the consecrated, sinless life of the incomparable personage of whom we speak, demanded a resurrection from the dead as an absolute necessity. If this had not followed, the life of Christ would have been the most insoluble riddle in the whole history of the world. It would have been like a build-



ing framed in all its parts most carefully and perfectly, but in which the key-stone had been most unaccountably omitted; or like a painting, executed with marvellous ability, but from which, however, the hand of the artist was removed, just before its completion, by the Lord God himself, leaving us in astonishment at the mystery of His providence. If Scripture did not aver anything concerning the resurrection of Jesus, the assertion that part of the gospel must have been lost would be perfectly reasonable and warranted. The resurrection of Christ thus presents itself as the indisputable sequence of His existence and life up to the time of His death.

But let it be supposed He did not rise again, where could the Dead One have remained? Search through the whole wide world, and you will discover no place which could have concealed Him. Was He in the custody of the Jews? Impossible! Would they not subsequently, and especially at the splendid triumph of the gospel on the day of Pentecost, have brought forth the Dead from His hiding-place, and, by the simple exhibition of His body, have achieved with one blow the downfall of this hated Christianity. Was his body deposited by His disciples in some remote and secret sepulchre? The Jews allege this even to the present hour, certainly in a very dubious manner, feeling, as they must, that no one will believe that the disciples would have been able to kindle within themselves enthusiasm sufficient to cause them to stake not only property, fame, and honour, but even dear life itself, for one by whom they had been most wickedly deluded and deceived in those blessed hopes which He himself had awakened in them. There remains therefore to unbelief, in the third place, only this supposition, that Christ, after He had distinctly foretold that He should die, and after three days rise again, when taken from the cross was not really dead, but only in a deep trance, from which He



awoke exactly on the third day purely by accident. But no one can put forward such an opinion without rendering himself liable to be considered as one who merely, to evade the pressure of the fact, does not consider the most absurd supposition too irrational as a last resource against his conscience and better knowledge. In order not to be obliged to surrender the citadel of his unbelief, such a man blows himself up together with his reason and his logic ! Not to say that it would have been wonderfully like a miracle if the Lord had awoke from His rigid trance exactly on the third day, the one which He had appointed for His return to life ; the Re-awakened One would soon have had to go the way of all flesh, that is to say, must have died : and where could He have expired so secretly and obscurely, that neither friend nor enemy, Jew nor Christian, should have discovered anything about His death ? Perhaps He plunged into the depths of the sea, or repaired to some remote uninhabited island. You see into what contradictions, what absurdities, that man falls who refuses to believe the miracle of the resurrection. Sound reason does not deny this miracle ; but, at its cost, and in opposition to it, a perverse will does, refusing to do homage to Christ, and to submit to His sceptre.

The day of Pentecost is an historical fact. This is beyond all question. Believe the baptism of fire by the Holy Spirit to be what you will, it is certain that the disciples of Christ at Pentecost received such a baptism, and that then and there, by the organising of the congregation at Jerusalem, the Christian Church on earth was founded. This fact no one will controvert. It was Christ, however, who foretold this day of Pentecost in the most definite manner, and added to this prophecy the important assertion, that, by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, He should give the first visible sign of His elevation to the right hand of the Father. This



sign, therefore, followed. And in the presence of such world-wide manifestations of life by the Prince of Peace, as well as of unheard-of miraculous operations, by means of which He, in so short a time, by a handful of poor Galileans, drew the whole Roman Empire to His banner; called into existence a new spiritual world, in the ordinances, customs, views, and ideas of which we all now live, will any one still doubt whether this Christ be risen from the dead? Why should you not, then, at once doubt all history, in which—I boldly affirm it—hardly anything recorded is so fully confirmed and verified as the fact, the memorial of which we celebrate at Easter. The First Epistle to the Corinthians was written by Paul, the contemporary of Christ and of all the other apostles. This is beyond all contradiction. Even our most unbelieving critics do not dare seriously to call it in question. But what do we read in this epistle? Loudly and openly before all the world the apostle here testifies, (chap. xv. 6,) that the Lord Jesus Christ, after His resurrection, “was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.” Any one zealous for the truth, who then doubted, might have arrived at certainty in the shortest and surest way. But the reality of the resurrection was seriously called in question by scarcely any one in the earliest centuries of the Christian epoch. On the contrary, the lapse of time served but to increase the number of the adherents to the Divine Prince of Life. And will *you* still doubt? Why then? Because death is death, and nobody ever returned from the grave. So, indeed, you are taught by the history of natural science, and hence the common saying of unbelievers, that the latter will in time entirely unhinge and displace Christianity. But whence do you derive authority to impose a limit upon the development of creative powers by the Author of nature, saying, “Thus far shalt thou go, and



no further," and to regard those laws by which nature is now sustained as fetters by which the Creator's hands are bound? Poor purblind mortals! Because in the present day no sinful child of Adam rises from the dead, do you conclude that the Son of God, the Sinless One, could not vanquish that death which He incurred on our account? A more foolish conclusion than this I cannot conceive. Away with it! You wilfully blind your eyes that you may not see, because you feel that, to be consistent, you must accept not only the resurrection of Christ, but many other things likewise; that you must not only give up and renounce much, but must give to your whole life another, a higher, and a more spiritual direction.

III. And *that* you doubtless must. For if Christ rose again from the dead on the third day, He is your divinely-accredited King and Lord; and so long as you withhold from Him homage, and do not render Him obedience, both in body and soul, you are rebels, obnoxious to punishment, without excuse. The confirmatory seal of the Most High shines upon all that He has revealed, taught, and ordained, and those who delay even for one moment to bow beneath His sceptre, are stigmatised as rebellious subjects. Did the Eternal Ruler raise His Son, crowned with glory and honour, from the dust of death?—then this latter is by such glorious exaltation proved to be the Redeemer of the world with power; and at the same time our natural condition is represented to be so hopelessly bad, that it could be relieved only by the unexampled manifestations of grace. But who would be concerned for such a sinner? for he strives with all his might against the requirement that he should be simply indebted for his salvation to the merits of another, to the righteousness of a Mediator. And precisely because men have an idea of the consequences incident to faith in the resurrection of Christ, they reject it; and maintain, in oppo-



sition to the voice of truth sounding loudly within them, that the sun in clear broad day, though brightly shining overhead, is not to be found in the heavens at all.

But it is to be hoped you are not among the number of those who wilfully evade a truth which is fitted to transform this earthly valley of the shadow of death into the portal of Paradise. I assume that your need of grace, peace, and a certain hope of everlasting life has made your eye single, and quickened your apprehension of the reality and glory of the Saviour's resurrection. Ye blessed ones! what a stream of comfort and of joy issues for you from the open grave in Joseph's garden! Oh say, after what are your aspirations? Is it after a Prince of Peace, whose brow God himself has encircled with the diadem of honour?—a Redeemer who, under His own hand and seal, has attested that He has “blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, and taken it out of the way?” (Col. ii. 14)—a Friend quite as powerful as He is condescending, in whom you may implicitly confide, on whose breast you may gently lean, into whose bosom you may shed your tears, and from whose love you may always indulge the highest hopes?—a Surety who, from His own experience, can satisfy you that death to the believer involves nothing further than being raised to the vision of God and glorification in the heavenly state? All this you have, and infinitely more, in Him who hails you from the ruins of His riven tomb, with His “Peace be unto you!”—the first morning salutation of a new life. Oh, fall at *His* feet in adoration and homage, whose resurrection already spreads the dawn of a heavenly day over your earthly existence. Open wide—and surely this can be no difficult matter—the portals of your heart to Him, that He may enter therein with the plenitude of His Easter consolations; and whithersoever you go or stay, released from cares, and having banished fears, with your inner soul attuned to perfect



harmony by the exulting message, "The Lord is really risen," re-echo the triumphant song of the poet:—

"The Lord is risen again!  
Where is now the death-sting?  
Where, O grave, the victory?  
Thanks to God, and praise and blessing,  
Christ for us hath risen—  
Christ, that lives in heaven,  
Hath to us the victory given!  
To the skies  
See Him rise!  
There, through Him, we follow!  
Farewell, death and sorrow! Amen."



## III.

## THE EMPTY GRAVE.

THE mere existence of the Christian Church is the mightiest evidence of the truth of the resurrection of Christ. It would not have existed if Christ had not risen ; and he who denies the resurrection believes in an absurdity, and accepts effects which have no causes. No doctrine of the Christian Church so clearly shews that the root of unbelief is to be found oftener in the heart than in the understanding, as that of the resurrection of Christ. Dispute with unbelievers concerning every other doctrine or fact of the Christian religion, and it is possible that, even though the point be not settled, you may leave off peaceably and pleasantly. But if you urge upon them evidences of the historical truth of the resurrection, they will part from you embittered and angry. Why this? Because they cannot escape the painful feeling that here all the weapons of their critical acuteness refuse to do them service, and the inward judge inexorably sentences them as men who wilfully shut themselves out from the truth against their better knowledge and convictions. When Peter, in his defence before the council, as reported in Acts v. 30, reminded them of Jesus' resurrection, and, in discussing its truth, appealed to his own ocular testimony as well as that of his fellow-disciples, and likewise to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, by which latter event the Lord had practically authenticated His exaltation to be "a Prince and



Saviour of Israel," his judges were "cut to the heart,"—that is to say, they were enraged, and combated that which they were unable to resist, with insolent defiance and wilful obduracy. Gamaliel alone perceived that this was not the right way to combat, but that where truth held the field it was more becoming to bow to her, whatever it might cost. May the honesty which characterised Gamaliel be, by God's grace, imparted to us, and may it accompany us throughout the whole course of our Easter meditations! May it not be denied us to-day!

MATT. xxviii. 5, 8; MARK xvi. 1-8; LUKE xxiv. 1-12; JOHN xx. 1-11.

"Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, when it was yet dark, came Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, and others with them, unto the sepulchre, bringing sweet spices which they had prepared that they might embalm him. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? But when they looked, they saw that it was rolled away, for it was very large. And they entered in, but found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And, as they were much perplexed concerning it, behold, there stood by them two men in shining garments; and they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth. But the angel answered and spake to the women, Fear not ye; I know ye seek Jesus who was crucified. But why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here: he is risen, as he said. Come see the place where the Lord lay. But go quickly, tell his disciples and Peter that he is risen from the dead. Remember how he spake to you when he was yet in Galilee: The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again: and behold he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him. Lo, I have told you. And they remembered his words, and went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they anything to any one, for they were afraid. But they told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest; but their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. Mary Magdalene cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said unto them, They have taken the Lord away out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and they came to the sepulchre; and so they did both run together, but that other disciple did outrun



Peter, and came first to the sepulchre ; and he stooped down, and looking in, he saw the linen clothes lying, yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin that had been about his head not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, went in also, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again together."

The primary incidents in connexion with our Lord's deserted tomb are thus narrated in the combined accounts of the evangelists, reported partly from their own observation, and partly from that of the female disciples. Where are now the irreconcilable discrepancies in their representations, which, according to the utterances of unbelief, annihilate the doctrine of the inspiration of the sacred writers, and expose them so palpably, that, at least with reference to the report before us, we are no longer on historic ground? I am unable to discover these contradictions. That Matthew and Mark only mention one angel as having spoken, whilst Luke and John speak of a second as having done so likewise, will hardly be considered a contradiction by any one. Mark's deviation from the other accounts appears more important, in stating that the women, when hastening back, told no one, whereas the other evangelists distinctly say that they told the disciples all that had happened to them. But let it be only supposed that the women told their secret to no one whom they met on the way—that they at first, partly from consternation, partly from joy, concealed it for a while even from the apostles; in this case Mark's account is no less accurate than that of Matthew, Luke, and John. But the greatest difficulty is presented in the circumstance that Mary Magdalene, who at early dawn joined the women going out, neither saw the angels at the same time as they did, nor heard their message, nor learned their errand. But the solution of the enigma is at hand, if we only—and what



should hinder us?—present the matter to ourselves in the following manner. Assuredly Mary Magdalene went out of Jerusalem with the other women, but, prompted by her quick temperament and impulsive habit, she rushed on before the others, taking probably some nearer bypath. Immediately upon her entering the garden, she, to her great consternation, observed that the sepulchre was shattered; and without tarrying for a moment, she hastened back to the city by the same path by which she had gone there, and told Peter and John that the body of our Lord had been carried off; having done which, she at once returned to the tomb with the two disciples. It was during this interval that those incidents transpired which happened to her friends in the garden of Joseph. They may, indeed, have left our Lord's tomb before Mary Magdalene and her companions had reached it. When the latter, to their no small grief, had convinced themselves that Mary Magdalene's report was correct, they forthwith returned to Jerusalem, whilst she, abandoned to grief, stopped at the tomb; and it was then and there that she was favoured with the sight of the Risen One, concerning which we shall hear more anon. This appearance was followed by that described in Matt. xxviii. 9, 10, in which her friends were cheered by our Lord's presenting Himself to them, the meeting taking place probably in a spot near the city. Or, in the above-mentioned passage, did Matthew only concisely relate that of which John gives a more detailed account? (chap. xx. 11–17.) And, in his short narrative, did Matthew assign to all the women those incidents which occurred to Mary Magdalene only? Many accept this version, and with its adoption the whole narrative of the evangelists is cleared from all perplexity. But, indeed, so it is without it. If we only can conceive the collocation of events to have been such as we have just represented, the harmony of the fourfold testimony is firmly established against all objections.



Now let us pass in review the different features of this highly suggestive picture. And first of all, let the mind's eye be attentively directed to *the women setting out at early dawn*; secondly, to *the incidents which befell them at the sepulchre*; thirdly, *their report to the assembled disciples*; as also, fourthly, *the issue of their communication*.

You remember that when the corpse was deposited in Elisha's tomb, it revived. In a spiritual sense, may we experience something similar! with this difference, however, that the effect wrought in us may be as much greater as the tomb we are now about to visit is greater, more sublime, and holier than was that of the prophet of Abel-Meholah.

I. Night still rested upon the holy city, and a gleam of dawn was visible in the distance, when by its aid a heart-affecting sight is presented to us in its quiet, deserted streets. It is the approach of the veiled procession. We recognise it as consisting of the female disciples of the crucified Lord. They move along with heads bowed low and eyes red with weeping. They have passed the night sleepless, or disquieted with unpleasant dreams; and now, as the Sabbath is over, they are silently moving towards the garden of Joseph, with their fine linen, their wreaths, and their spices, in order to render the last offices of love to the dear remains of their departed Friend, which had been interrupted when He was laid in the tomb. Most of them are already known to you. You see among them *Johanna*, wife of Chuza, an official of Herod the king; *Salome*, the richly blessed mother of Zebedee's children, the two apostles, John and James; the three Marys—*Mary*, wife of Cleopas, and mother of James the Less and of Joses; another *Mary*, perhaps Mary of Bethany, sister of Lazarus and Martha; and *Mary Magdalene*, who had been saved as a brand from the fire, and now burns with more fervent affection than all the others for her beloved Saviour. Mary, the mother of the Lord, is not in the



funeral procession. Crushed by the terrible blow which she has experienced, this sorely-afflicted one remains bathed in tears under the roof of her adopted son, John. But we rejoice that our last view of her is not in this hour of sorrow. We find her on the day of Pentecost abundantly comforted; happy once more, truly happy; and when she shortly afterwards disappears from our view, we will know where to look for the "highly-favoured one."

The sorrow-stricken women move silently along. It is not until they have nearly reached the garden that a petty care unseals their lips, and we hear them say, "Who will remove the stone for us from the mouth of the sepulchre?" Thus all their wishes and desires resolved themselves into this trivial solicitude. Considering the unequivocal prophecies which they had repeatedly heard from the mouth of their Master, this seems hardly conceivable. But the fearful and bloody end of His life must have fallen like a terrific, devastating hailstorm upon the harvest-field of their hopes and recollections. Even supposing the inexpressible consternation into which they had been thrown to have left them adequate opportunity and self-possession to remember what He had heretofore said most unequivocally, in reference to His resurrection after His previous crucifixion, yet they must have regarded it as a settled matter that they were only authorised to give it a spiritual meaning, or, at the utmost, to apply it to the resurrection at the last day. For the present, and for all time, He figured in the range of their gloomy and veiled notions but as one of the dead—an inanimate corpse. Hence they restricted all their affectionate solicitude to one object—gently and reverentially to commit His remains to their long sleep in the bosom of the earth. Alas! how many are there now-a-days who, like the women, need to have the stone rolled away from the door of their Saviour's sepulchre! To how many who are baptized in



and called by His holy name, is Christ but a corpse still! Were they but equally distressed and anxious for salvation, as were these female disciples now on their way to His tomb, surely we might trace an analogy in their subsequent experience! But our risen Lord to this hour withdraws Himself from all who will not feel their need of Him, from all who are satisfied with their own righteousness. Yes! their besetting self-love and self-sufficiency work their delusion; they are ever seeking the living among the dead, whilst, on the contrary, the Church of our God never ceases to ring with hallelujahs, simply because He *is* risen; and instead of rejoicing with believers, saying, "Jesus lives, and I too live in him," and seeing heaven opened to them, they must needs repeat the disconsolate commonplace, "No one has ever returned from the realms of the dead." Poor souls! how are they to be pitied!

II. When these mourners reached the garden, they were still occupied with the anxious desire to know "who should remove the massive stone from the entrance to the tomb." What do they perceive there? Oh! what can it mean? Behold! the stone has already been moved aside, and the interior of the tomb lies exposed. But the spectacle plunges them in fresh perplexity, The weakness of their faith suggests that some violence had been practised upon His dear remains. Trembling with fearful anticipation, they draw near the sepulchre! Lo! suddenly there gleams forth from it a beam of light like lightning, and by its marvellous brilliancy they discover two figures, young men clad in glittering garments, in whom they immediately recognise two beings from another world, two angels of God. Do not marvel that the resurrection should have been accompanied by such extraordinary appearances as these. Without such, as some one has truly observed, the resurrection of Christ would have been a spring without flowers, a sun without rays, a



victory without a triumphal wreath. It was right that the majesty of the Almighty should be revealed in every possible way in connexion with it, and holy angelic beings are truly some of the most lovely rays of His glory. Yet they were not present for the sake of pageant or parade, but, as on every other occasion, so likewise on this, for the sake of those who are heirs of salvation. They had been sent as heralds, to communicate a message. Scarcely had the women recovered from their first astonishment, when one of the angels opened his gracious lips, and speaking to the sorrowful party from within the tomb, said, "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, who was crucified. Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here. *He is risen*, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

There you have one of the most blessed messages ever yet heard on earth. The plain simple form in which it presents itself to us at once stamps it with the impress of truth! The mere poet or mythologist would have made the messengers of God proclaim more emphatically and ostentatiously an event which lighted up earth's dark valley of death with a starry firmament of the brightest hopes. But the heavenly messengers were intent only upon informing mankind of the historical fact, and they left it to the highly-favoured ones themselves to celebrate the wonderful event in psalms and songs of praise. It cannot escape you that the mode in which the angels express themselves proposed nothing beyond announcing, with due emphasis, the reality of the resurrection of Christ, and placing it beyond all doubt. *The "Crucified One,"* say they, He whom the women seek in the grave, *is risen* from the dead. Yes! *He Himself* arose, and that, too, *bodily*, as He was buried. Here from the place where He lay has He raised Himself. Through this open stone doorway has He gone forth again alive. "*Fear not ye.*" With how much stronger emphasis might that "*Fear*



*not ye*" be proclaimed in this sinful world, than on that sacred night when the shepherds on Bethlehem's plains were greeted with the same salutation ! For now fear, care, terror, and doubt were utterly banished from every secret hiding-place. Who would now be disposed to accuse, or who' to condemn ? and what now remained to oppress and terrify the poor heart of man ?

Whether Jesus Christ be really the only-begotten Son of the Father, whether His work of mediation be held in the Father's eyes to be fully perfected and sufficient for the expiation of our sins, whether the way of salvation which He has pointed out to us be the one leading there surely and infallibly, and whether death has been really vanquished and paradise regained for us by Him,—all these and many other glorious truths beside are now placed by the resurrection beyond doubt. Their affirmation was decided ; it was most clearly confirmed by the seal of the Most High. There is no longer any distressing condition upon earth to which the "*Fear not ye*" of the angels, together with the powerful grounds of consolation on which that utterance is founded, may not be applied. It brightens the darkest nights of sorrow with divine gleams of hope, and banishes, at least, the horror of despair from the gloomiest vales of life.

The women feel conscious of the profound significance of the angel's exclamation ; but again they are so overcome by the greatness of the joyful news thus intimated, that at first they can only rejoice with trembling. They stand there dumb with wonder. But the heavenly messenger rouses them from their torpor, commanding them forthwith to go and tell the disciples of the Lord, and especially Peter, that their Master had risen, and is alive again. Truly a more glorious errand than this was never committed to any mortal ! That which makes our office, the office of ambassadors



for Christ, the most delightful on earth, is, that the charge committed to the minister of Christ is analogous to that given to the women. How enviable would the preacher of the gospel be, if the message which he has to declare were everywhere and at once believingly received! How happy would the world be made by his presence, dispelling on all sides the shadows of sorrow, spreading sunshine over the beds of the sick and the dying, and transforming the grave itself into a peaceful place of rest, nay, rather, into the gate of heaven! He would be the angel of humanity; peace and joy would ever attend his steps. But, in a majority of cases, how long have we to knock at the fast-closed doors of the heart, ere it be opened to receive our message! This may be salutary for us as an exercise of humility and of prostration in the dust, but the world only excites our commiseration. In God's own gracious time, however, we are ever and anon encouraged by a specific message to individuals, as were these good women who were desired to announce a fact to the eleven and to Peter. It was cordially received by them all, but especially by Peter. What could be more touching, and, at the same time, more elevating, than this special mention of the poor fallen disciple? "Tell it to Peter." It shall be first announced to him; before all others to him, weeping in retirement, overcome with penitence and shame. No one was so near to the heart of the risen Saviour as he was. I ask again, could there be anything more touching, and, at the same time, more consolatory, than this more than motherly tenderness of the Lord of lords for His contrite, broken-hearted Simon? Together with the notification of the resurrection, the women were desired to remind the eleven of a previous utterance of their Master, according to which He engaged that, after His resurrection, He would go before them into Galilee. The angel expressly told the women this, and emphasised His words, adding,



*"Lo, I have told you!"* These female disciples, agitated with inexpressible emotions, and perhaps yet doubtful whether they were awake or only under the illusion of a pleasant dream, hasten back to the city. They encounter several persons on their road, but, maintaining strict silence, they hasten by them, keeping their secret locked up in their breasts.

III. But we will leave them for a few moments, and turn our attention to another incident. We know already that at early dawn, when the women had scarcely reached the precincts of the city, Mary Magdalene, whose temperament most resembled Peter's, had hastened before them, on wings of impatience, by a shorter road. To see the open and empty tomb, and to hasten back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples the alarming news, were to her but one operation. She met John, and his friend Peter, in the city, and gave them as a sad morning salutation the sorrowful news, "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him," (John xx. 2.) At this news the two hurried away to the garden; and Mary Magdalene returning scarcely was outrun by them. They arrived there just as the other women had left the sacred spot; they actually found everything as Mary had informed them. The stone was rolled away, and the grave was empty. John arrived there first; but either from tender awe, or fear that his feelings would be too much for him, he did not enter the tomb, though, from a little distance, he looked into it, and saw the linen clothes in which the beloved remains had been wrapped. Peter, on the other hand, to search out the matter, entered the sepulchre, and we know what there met his eye. Folded, as by a careful hand, lay the napkins and linen clothes in one place, and in another, folded also smoothly and carefully, lay the napkin which had been bound round our Lord's bleeding head. Then John wished to see it also, and rever-



ently, as if his foot were on holy ground, entered the sepulchre. Certainly the napkin thus neatly folded would have seemed to them to indicate anything rather than a violent abstraction of the body; but this circumstance was inadequate to suggest more than a fleeting thought of the real bodily *resurrection* of the Lord. This seems incomprehensible to us, but it actually was so. The Gospel says, "*For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.*" And truly they did *not* know it. If they had ever read anything about the victory over death to be achieved by the expected Messiah, or had they ever heard anything concerning it from the mouth of their Master himself, like Mary and Martha just before the approaching resuscitation of their brother Lazarus, they lost and dissipated the real sense by assigning a subtilised and spiritual one. They returned despondently from the garden of Joseph to Jerusalem, but without their friend Mary Magdalene, who could not yet tear herself from *His* grave who was to her all in all.

The two had just returned home to the other disciples, when, possibly some few moments after their arrival, the women, whom in our narrative we accompanied for some distance on their way home, arrived likewise. We see them, in a state of the highest excitement, join the circle of the disciples. Here, likewise, their lips are for a while closely sealed. Will anything so wonderful be believed? Indeed, the fact, as narrated, and which they had to repeat, was to them of overwhelming import, and in itself transcendently glorious. But joy presently unsealed their lips, and we now hear them each vying with the other in animation, relieving their full hearts by telling of the marvellous things which they had seen and heard. They report that they had been favoured with a vision of angels, and then deliver the transporting message which one of the heavenly heralds had com-



mitted to them for the disciples. And they have yet something much more important still, to which we shall recur later. For they insist upon it, that they have personally seen the Lord himself. The disciples hear, but scarcely trust their ears. "Angels in their Master's tomb! And assurance from the lips of one of them that the Master is risen! Nay, more than that, an interview with the Risen One himself! Oh, that all this had not transpired under the veil of twilight, and that the message had been delivered by other lips than those of excited and credulous women! For John and Simon were both there too, and they saw and heard nothing of it." With such thoughts as these the eleven are exercised, and *they do not believe*; or rather let me say, they strive against belief. It was just so with the other disciples when they heard of it. "For the words of the women," according to historic record, "appeared to them as idle tales." Poor men! how little confidence do they shew in the power and love of the living God; how little ability have they to grasp the divine scheme of salvation to be wrought out by Christ; how limited was their apprehension of all that they had heard, during three whole years, from the mouth of the Master himself, as to the real object of His mission to the world! Indeed, it is difficult to say how far the natural man is carried away from belief in a living God constantly operating creatively; he gets entangled in what we style "the unchangeable laws of nature." And up to this very day we cannot get absolutely clear of secret doubt, as to whether the resurrection be not a fable, though the most cogent arguments for its historical truth be brought home to the understanding, unless the Holy Spirit has perfected in us the work of Divine illumination, and has, with the pangs of the new birth, thoroughly convinced us that we are irrecoverably lost, without a God-man Mediator sacrificed as a sin-offering for us, and then raised again from the



dust of death to the glory of a new life. But if the light of Pentecost dispel our darkness, it will then truly appear incomprehensible how we should ever have given room to the slightest doubt as to an event distinguished by more confirmatory seals than any other in universal history. May the Lord help us likewise, in the way above indicated, to a right belief of the resurrection, and loose the tongue of our hearts, so that we may shout with the sacred poet—

“Emmanuel’s glory pledged to me,  
All in all I now possess;  
Above He keeps a heavenly home  
For my soul in readiness;  
Though sin and curse hang o’er me still,  
I conquer’d *have*, and conquer *will*.

“Through the world I joyous travel,  
With Christ my strength I’m glad at soul  
Happy now though waves of trouble  
Still across my bosom roll!  
Happier when, life’s voyage o’er,  
My bark shall rest for evermore!”



## IV.

## CHRIST'S FIRST APPEARANCE.

THAT the risen Saviour should, as the apostle Peter expressly observes in Acts x. 41, "have appeared *not to all the people, but only unto witnesses chosen before of God*," has excited in many surprise, and shaken the faith of others. It is not difficult, however, to perceive why it was so. In the first place, the Lord had brought His *ministry* to a close; and to a generation that had wilfully and obstinately resisted the truth proclaimed by Him, the appearance of the Risen One would have been a matter of indifference, and without results. On the other hand, if He had shewn Himself again to a hostile people, the proverb would only have been verified in their experience, which Christ, in the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus, put in Abraham's mouth—"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." Moreover, had it come to pass that the people were constrained to admit the Risen One was neither a phantom, nor one merely awakened out of a trance, but really risen from the dead, the fruit and effect of the conviction thus attained would have been but idle astonishment, or a blind enthusiasm, or a disposition excited in them to make Him a king; but without a believing surrender of the heart to Him. Finally, the purpose involved in our Lord's manifestations of Himself during the forty days, was simply to crown the faith of believers, to



spiritualise still more the communion into which they had already entered with Him as their Divine Head, and to give it a heavenly glorification. This was a purpose which, from its nature, could not extend to the great masses who were ruled by a worldly spirit. Here that law was brought into exercise, "that to him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly." The scenes reported as having transpired during the forty days, unveil the outskirts of paradise. Here a barrier had necessarily to be erected, and the profane were warned to keep their distance. Our Lord rejected the service of an extorted faith; that which He accepted was the spontaneous affection of a soul feeling its need of salvation. And He did not look around for such in vain. We shall presently have an opportunity of convincing ourselves of the fact.

## JOHN xx. 11-18.

"But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping; and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her."

Might we not, whenever this Gospel is read, imagine that we were listening to a hymn of praise of ecstatic harmony in connexion with the resurrection, rather than a narrative of the event. What object can be more charming,



affecting, and tender, than the scene which is here brought under our observation? A higher world here stands out from the lower one, in which all that we prize as most beautiful and noble upon earth is presented to us as lighted up with heavenly glory; and from thence a light beams on us, in the wondrous radiance of which every gloomy care in our own course is dissipated. In its light, the way through the valley of our pilgrimage, stretching beyond death and the tomb, lies disclosed before us as a peaceful path blooming with the most exalted hopes. Let us contemplate this attractive story from a nearer point of view, and may our spiritual energies be increased by meditation *upon the first appearance of the risen Prince of Peace. In Mary's grief we shall recognise the indispensable condition of all true joy in the resurrection; and in the personal revelation of the Prince of the Resurrection, we shall find the end of all earthly sorrows.* May that happiness be again experienced in our midst which was then realised by Mary Magdalene. The Lord of His mercy grant it!

I. The rising sun is just about to gild the tops of the mountains of Judea with the first roseate tints of dawn. It is spring, and day breaks beautifully over the realm of nature, whilst One incomparably more beautiful breaks over the spiritual world. You will see nothing of the latter at the moment we are entering Joseph's garden. On the contrary, our eye at once fixes itself upon a scene which forms a harsh contrast to the cheerful festive dress with which newly-awakened nature is adorned. Look yonder! do you not see, between those shrubs in front of the open sepulchre, the veil of mourning waving in the breeze? Who is she who, all alone, has found her way here so early, whose eyes are swimming in tears, and who, with her head leaning on the stone, seems ready to faint with agony and grief? You know her. It is that disciple whom you saw, at the Pharisee's



house, a while ago, wash her Divine Master's feet with her tears and dry them with the hair of her head,—she who once went so far astray, and was so fearfully possessed,—she whom her Lord liberated from the power of seven devils, and in a peculiar manner rescued as a brand out of the fire. Much had been forgiven her, and therefore she loved and still loves much. How happy was she then, so gloriously saved! But, alas! her sun declined, and the day of her peace, according to all appearance, was never likely to dawn again. What she, when sobered down from worldly intoxication, once desired, with passionate impatience, whether men call it truth or assurance,—that God would restore her to favour, confer power to overcome Satan and the world, and the hope of eternal life,—all these, and much more besides, Mary Magdalene had found in Jesus her Prince of Peace. Through His instrumentality, she saw her past merged in the sea of oblivion; the blissful rays of His grace and love to sinners brightened up her present and her future. Whenever she contrasted her present with her past, she felt as if she must join in the holy Virgin's anthem—"Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." But now, all that beautiful world, in which she was once so happy, lies shattered before her. Its foundations are broken up. Her Surety for all that she had accepted as eternal truth, had sunk in death, and was still held by death. And had only His lifeless corpse still been there, Mary would certainly have bathed even this with her tears. But then—What! would she then still hope in a resurrection? I will not precisely maintain that; but the contrast between the spotless innocence of her Divine Friend, and the dreadful termination of His life, are presented to her mind in such glaring, yea, in such appalling contradiction, that it seems to her the world must sink in ruins, unless there be a harmonious settlement, unless there be a satisfactory explanation



of the dreadful mystery. She has no longer any clearly-defined ground of hope, especially now that His dear remains have disappeared. But why does she perpetually repeat those prying glances into the empty sepulchre? A certain something, which at least borders on hope, lingers and lives in the depths of her soul. It is, however, only like a slender flame in a room where the draught from the door or window makes it flicker to and fro, and threatens every moment to put it out.

But did not the disciple deserve a severe rebuke for her excessive grief, since she was not bereft of everything? Her Master's teaching and His bright example were still left to her. To put such a question as this, betrays in the speaker a very superficial notion of what is needed above everything else by sinful humanity. What could Christ's teaching be to Mary, if the teacher, instead of being accredited, were repudiated by God? What the value of all His engagements and promises, if the Eternal left Him without the attesting seal? What His mediatorial redemption, if the closing scene in the life of Him who assumed to be the surety of this redemption, stamped it as a failure? What the hope of future bliss, if He who suggested it Himself remained under the power of death? She saw her whole salvation strictly connected with the personality of the man; and in this she was perfectly right. She needed a propitiator and mediator accredited of God, who could be her representative before the Judge of the living and of the dead, who could secure to her the Divine favour, who could give her eternal life. Without such a one, she wanted everything that could set her soul at ease. She had believed that she had found him: according to present appearances, however, her faith had been but a beautiful, blissful dream. Will you still doubt whether she had good reason for shedding those tears before the empty sepulchre? Assuredly you would not, were you to place yourself in her position.



But be assured there is no Easter joy in the resurrection to the man who, the instant he conceives the Mediator as having been removed, knows nothing of Mary's anguish, who does not feel himself to be unhappy, helpless, and wretched, with an intensity of feeling like hers. The first condition of participation in the joy of the resurrection lies in this, that after a man has been thoroughly convinced of his lost state, he passionately thirst for the grace of God and the assurance of eternal life,—that he feel and confess all the world can offer to relieve this craving is inadequate. As it was with Mary Magdalene in the instance before us, so he will never attain inward peace until he have met One who came down from heaven to earth, not only to announce in God's name pardon to sinners, but who confirmed the cheering message in a manner that commended itself alike to both head and heart. And this One has appeared. The soul which finds itself in despair as to all human counsel and comfort, and yearns for some fixed grounds of hope, will infallibly and speedily discover Him in the Lord of the resurrection, and having done so, will ask nothing further of heaven or earth.

Mary bends down again, and tries once more to pry into the sepulchre, as though it were inconceivable that the dear remains should have disappeared from within it. She sees two noble forms in white garments, the one sitting at the head, the other at the foot, where the body of Jesus had lain. We know who these living antitypes of the cherubim standing upon the ark of the covenant were. O you who, having turned aside from the faith, still follow your own ways, learn here to have some perception, though imperfect, how happy they are, even on this side the grave, to whom the gospel is a truth in their inmost souls. All terrors are, for them, removed; the heavenly world rises before their view as one of glory, and imparts its glory to this earth;



even from the tomb they are hailed by the divine heralds of peace, with transporting announcements of immortal life. "*Woman, why weepest thou?*" One of the heavenly watchers at the sepulchre addresses in these words a female disciple dissolved in tears. It is still uncertain whether she recognised the angels as such, or whether she thought them mere men. But granting that she recognised the angels to be such, it was not they of whom she was in search, but a totally different Being: and even the highly encouraging question, "*Woman, why weepest thou?*" would only have tended to wound her more deeply, for it must have been unintelligible to her why any one should inquire the cause of her tears. "*They have taken away my Lord,*" she replied, sobbing, "*and I know not where they have laid him.*" How affecting are these words! and how much faith gleams through that expression, "*My Lord,*" notwithstanding all her other unbelief! Whatever may have become of Him, He remains, now as before, her Lord, and she His humble and devoted handmaid and disciple. She still convulsively clings to the dead, like one suspended over a yawning abyss, who clutches the last holdfast he could seize in the act of falling. If she must give up the Master for lost, a whole host of holy angels, however friendly their approach, would have failed to compensate for His absence. And this feeling of hers is neither unfounded nor illusory. What could the angels offer her, who needed a Mediator, to reunite the broken ties between her and the thrice Holy One above, and to present her, a sinner fallen under the curse of the law, justified before God?

II. Mary Magdalene, after this short interview with the angels, resigns herself again to grief. Anon she hears footsteps behind her. Turning hastily round, who is it that stands before her tear-bedimmed eyes? One whom she supposes to be Joseph's gardener. But what was he to her?



She leans her head back on the stone, and her tears again flow more abundantly. You need not be surprised that she did not know Him, though she looked Him in the face. Only remember her poor suffused eyes, and that world filled with images of mourning and of death to which her spirit was confined, and which had no room for the living. Indeed she might rightly call the Unknown One a gardener. He was so,—a heavenly one, who now drew near to restore and raise again, with tender hand, a flower that had been beaten down and nearly broken off the stem by the storm. Whoever weeps after Him He is not far from, no matter where the spot may be. The supposed gardener opens His gracious lips, and says, "Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?" These, then, were His first words after His resurrection. Oh matchless morning salutation!—a greeting of comprehensive import for the whole body of believers! The expression, "*Wherefore this weeping? why these tears?*" removes every cause for them, and is equivalent to that command in the Book of Revelation, uttered in the exercise of Divine authority, "*Weep not!* the Lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed." Whatever they may seek,—whether it be truth, whether it be peace, whether it be consolation in life and in death,—that expression, "What seekest thou?" instructs them that they might long since have found it, since God hath prepared it abundantly in Him in whom lie hidden "all the treasures both of wisdom and knowledge," as well as those of "grace and salvation." O Mary, at any rate understand that! "Why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?" But, enveloped in the web of her gloomy fancies, she hears in that which was an unmingled promise only an idle, if not an insulting question. Foolishly, though with touching simplicity, she replies, "Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away." How heart-stirring this word "*Him*"



is, as uttered by her. At first she thinks it would be superfluous to mention His name. She thinks that all the world must know of whom she speaks. She speaks of Him, the only one who fills her whole soul, and in whom is bound up *all* that she thinks it worth while to inquire for. "*Hast thou borne Him away?*" Yes, Mary, He has done so. Oh, if she had but a surmise of this mystery! "*Tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away.*" And indeed, had He but told her, she would, without calculating her strength, have started at once on the errand, even though the spot named should have been miles off. Had this attachment to the person of her Master been an error, it would, at this stage, have been the Master's duty to have rectified it. Correcting her views, He would have said, "Mary, let the Man go whose loss thou bewailest, since thou hast His promise to save thee, which is all that is necessary." But such an expression never escaped His lips. He, on the contrary, put the stamp of His approbation upon her lingering affection for Him; for He satisfied it, and gave Himself back to her who had mourned His loss.

What a scene is now opening upon us! The condescending One can no longer refrain. His bowels of mercy yearn. He must release the sobbing mourner from the prison of her gloomy thoughts. And in what an inimitably tender manner does He do this, the mode suiting itself to the profoundest cravings of her heart! Well, you already know it. He again opens His gracious lips, and there issues from them what may well be called the most transporting sound that ever fell on human ear and heart, and which no mortal lips may ever rival in sweetness of utterance. It was a word, an utterance, in which the speaker expressed all His grace and love. Yes! the infinite was hidden in it; possibly it gives us a presentiment of the language of heaven, where speech is the expression and impress of perfect truth and harmony,



and where a world of sacred thoughts and blissful feelings is developed by one word or tone. He calls her, who stood before Him dissolved in tears, by name, with that gracious intonation to which her ear had been accustomed in earlier days. In merely human friendly relations, how much comfort and encouragement may be thrown into the tones with which the closely-allied address each other by name, is not unknown to you. And in this instance there was much more than a human friend! "Mary!" He says, with uplifted voice, as though He would fain say, "Thou richly-blest, thou highly-favoured one, *dost THOU droop the head? dost THOU mourn? dost THOU weep?*" But all effort would be vain that should attempt to render, by any corresponding expression, the genial, cheering sense, the plenitude of promise and blessedness involved in that one word, "Mary!" It is only in some restricted measure, and but faintly, revealed to one susceptible of the feeling. In that "Mary!" pealed all the merry chimes of Easter-tide at once. All the blessedness that stands associated with the resurrection radiates from it upon us. The word "Mary," thus intoned, floats through the air far beyond the disciple herself, and is indeed a congratulation addressed by the Divine Conqueror over death to His ineffably-favoured Church.

"Mary!" Joyfully startled at the sound of her name, she turns round; and who stands before her? Can she believe her eyes? or does some sweet dream mock her? "Is it Thou? art Thou really He?" Yes, Mary, it is He! To recognise the Risen One, and to fall at His feet in adoration, is, on the disciple's part, the act of one moment; but to express the agitated feelings which move her heart at this moment, she finds none other than the suddenly-extorted exclamation, "Rabboni!"—that is, "My Lord and Master!" Whatever of filial reverence, of unreserved devotion, of sacred passionate affection, and superhuman joy can enter into the



poor human heart, is here presented to us in a compressed form by the one word "Rabboni!" This word Rabboni is an open vessel from which exhales fragrance like the odours of paradise. It mirrors to us the radiant form with which the love of Christ can glorify the inner man. It is the cry of homage, of adoration, and of unconditional subjection; but first, and above all, a cry of joy and rejoicing. And how well this rejoicing is warranted! For He is alive again who died on the cross, and in His appearance Mary sees—and we do so likewise—the end of all the cares, pains, and troubles of this mortal life. For as His whole doctrine, and especially His testimony to the superhuman dignity of His own person, now shine for the first time in the full splendour of divine confirmation, so likewise it is only now for the first time actually placed beyond all doubt, that He has finished His work of salvation to the highest satisfaction of His heavenly Father,—that the latter has accepted, as fully justificatory, the ransom paid for us,—that the debt is paid for all who through faith become one with Him, the second Adam,—that righteousness has been wrought out,—that heaven has been taken possession of for us,—and that the world, death, the devil, and hell have been finally and for ever vanquished. Yes, at Easter the redeemed Church celebrates the coronation of its *Mediator, Surety, and Representative*. The apostle intimates it by his triumphant appeal in Romans viii. 34, "Who is he that condemneth?" primarily based upon our Lord's death on the cross, but supplemented and supported by the sentence, "Yea rather who is risen again," by Christ's resurrection, the miracle of the third day.

The disciple, prostrate, seems, in her joyous excitement, as though about to have embraced her Master's feet. And then it was that she received that rebuff which has ever appeared so mysterious to expositors,—"*Touch me not,*" says the Lord, "*for I am not yet ascended to my Father.*" This



saying will not appear so difficult if I—and the original text fully warrants my doing so—change our translation, “*Touch me not,*” into, “*Do not cling to me,*” or, “*Do not clasp me tightly.*” Thus our Lord’s purpose, in the first place, is restricted to decline, in the most tender manner, the exuberance of human feeling with which the disciple greets His reappearance, and to give her to understand that the previous intercourse of His followers with Him would thenceforth have to yield to one higher and more spiritual. He tacitly reminds her of His own declaration, (John xii. 32,) “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” In the next place, that the disciple should not dream that she had already met her Lord and Master in heaven, and that the mode of His reappearance, in which she at that moment rejoiced, would be a lasting one, He suggests that He has not yet ascended, and that she had still a great tract to traverse through the vale of pilgrimage ere faith would be changed to sight. Whether He finally gave her to understand that she need not endeavour anxiously to cling to Him, since He did not stand before her as a fleeting vision from another world, but that for a while He was about to sojourn upon earth, and that He should meet her again here below,—whether this be the true import of the expression, may remain undecided. Some attach the latter sense to His words, and there may be ground for that opinion. Mary was not to be grieved by the bearing which the Lord assumed with reference to her, but only brought back from her excitement to clearer, calmer self-possession; and hence the Lord adds to His address, which was of a nature to calm her strong feelings, that comforting message, so full of promise, and disclosing, as it does, such glorious prospects for the future—“*Go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*” What a fulness of most blessed meaning there is in this utterance! His “*brethren!*” He



had never specially addressed them so before. He first gives them this honourable name just as He is about to enter on the inheritance. Let us congratulate ourselves upon this circumstance. But let our mutual felicitations be still greater upon that equality with Himself, transcending our boldest expectations, with which He honours His redeemed ones in the words, "*I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*" For what does He thereby express, unless it be that the Almighty, after Jesus had successfully carried out our suit before Him, was, so far as affection and love were concerned, as much our Father as His. He here repeats that which He had already said in His prayer as High Priest to His heavenly Father, "*Thou lovest them, as thou lovest me,*" (John xvii. 23;) and we afterwards hear its echo in the words of the disciple who lay on Jesus' breast, "*As he,*" the Son of His love, "*is, so are also we in this world.*" It is, at the same time, unmistakably our Lord's intention to remit the disciple again to the Church, and thereby to preserve her from the thought that she stood in some extraordinarily favoured position with reference to Himself; therefore He sends her to the "*brethren,*" and says to her, she being comprised with the others, "*to your Father,*" and "*to your God.*"

Abundantly consoled and overflowing with joy, Mary hastens from the spot to execute her Lord's command. Ere she reached the assembled disciples, she, with a beaming face, shouts out her most joyous message from the distance, "*I have seen the Lord, and He has spoken to me.*" Your Jesus lives! This suffices her, and she is right, in that she allows herself to be content with that fact. As long as there was any doubt as to what had become of the corpse, the whole human race had urgent cause to stand weeping before the tomb, awaiting in the most intense excitement what the third day should bring forth. This day had now consummated in one event all that was needed by humanity



for its salvation and peace for time and eternity. The day brought *Him* back alive from the dead: it presented *Him* to us absolved of God from all our sins; *Him* crowned with glory and honour, having representatively endured our curse. Easter-day brought us, in the resurrection of Jesus, God's confirmatory Yea and Amen to all our Lord's testimony; God's seal of eternal Sonship affixed; God's receipt, in full, for the sum total of the debt of our race paid by Him; the declaration that both Head and members were in the highest degree worthy to enter the Father's house; the revelation of the triumph achieved over death and over him who has the power of death, even the devil; the indubitable certainty that death in the fellowship of the Prince of Life is the highest gain; and, finally, sure guarantee that the bodies of His people are not lost in their graves, but slumber, awaiting a glorious issue to life and everlasting glory. Oh! what unrivalled and radiant hopes the resurrection has poured forth upon our earth; it illumines with a transforming heavenly sunshine the darkest spots, the most sombre chambers of sorrow, and the blackest nights of care in the vale of our pilgrimage. Brother, does it beam on thee? or do the dark clouds of doubt still envelope thee? Oh, that thou mightest inquire after Him with the passionate longing of Mary Magdalene; then, indeed, He would ere long call thee also by name, and thou shouldest stammer forth in ecstasy and homage thy "Rabboni." May God's grace bring this to pass, and may we, by the power of the Holy Spirit, one and all, presently be enabled to make that hymn to the Lord of the resurrection our own—

"Jesus my Redeemer lives!

Christ my trust is dead no more;

In the strength this knowledge gives,

Shall not all my fears be o'er?

Calm, though death's long night be fraught

Still with many an anxious thought.



## V.

THE RISEN ONE APPEARS TO THE WOMEN AND  
TO SIMON.

THE apostle Paul having just exhorted his companion and helper Timothy to arm himself for the fight against the hostile powers of the world, and having encouraged him to endure the cross perseveringly, has exhausted the subject, exclaiming, in the well-known passage in 2 Tim. ii. 8, "*Remember that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead.*" He seeks to impress him with an image that shall permanently stand in the foreground of his soul, presenting itself ever clearly defined there. The figure is that of the Lord Jesus; in fact, the radiant form of the risen Saviour. With reference to this, the apostle held that the direct contemplation of this victor form upon every field of battle would lead his beloved friend to speedy and certain triumph. He held such an anticipation to be justified by his own experience. Hear him, immediately after the above-quoted passage, declare that "he suffered for the gospel of the risen One even unto bonds;" and from how many other passages in his epistles does it unequivocally appear that a lively remembrance of Him who was dead, and is alive again, proved to the apostle an inexhaustible source of energy, courage, and peace. Paul felt sure that Timothy's experience would, provided he followed his advice, be coincident with his own. From the contemplation of the risen Saviour by the enlightened mind, there



arises a blissful and fortifying influence which nothing else can supply. That so many amongst us, in the struggles of life, but too readily despair and succumb, is solely attributable to the fact that the risen Saviour has not yet presented Himself to them in the right light, or that they do not know how to retain Him fixedly and steadily in view. If we, who minister in the Word, would shew ourselves "*helpers of the joy*" of our congregations, let us preach to them the miracle of the resurrection. What could I desire more than to succeed, by these our Easter meditations, in imprinting upon your minds and hearts, in ardent characters of love, and that indelibly, the sublime form of Him who vanquished sin, death, and hell! May He in mercy grant it, who alone has the power to do so, whom we are about to see reward the fidelity of those elect women, who, to the disgrace of the men, remained His stanch adherents, without wavering, previous to the time of His resurrection, up to His latest breath, in spite of contumely, and at the peril of their lives.

MATT. xxviii. 9, 10; LUKE xxiv. 34.

"And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail! And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me." "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon."

"Ye blissful forty days  
To me are forty years;  
In them, O my Saviour,  
I silence all my fears.  
Henceforth be my heart's employment,  
All absorb'd in Thy enjoyment."

Thus sang a pious poet. From the depths of our soul we join in with the sentiment. The forty days are to us the light of a new and glorious world. And God be praised, that the end of the world was not coincident with that of those days: it exists to this hour! That which we here see



befall the women, and then Peter, equally happens to believers still. Let us dwell on this topic for a while, and consider, first, *the meeting with the female disciples, and then that with Simon*. May the Lord vouchsafe us, in the course of our meditation, a similar revelation to that with which they were favoured!

I. The women to whom our attention is first directed are already known to us. We also know where they went at early dawn. They had been to the tomb of their souls' Friend; and with what joyous excitement and with what a message had they just returned! They have to report, not upon human testimony, but from the lips of holy angels, nothing less than this—that the omnipotent voice of the living God, and not the hand of enemies, as they had feared, had burst their Master's tomb; and that He who was dead, having raised Himself triumphantly out of the dust, is alive again. However, they feel so much astonishment in this great matter, that they are constrained to ask themselves again and again whether they merely dream, or be really awake. Just like the apostle in the Gospel, who, walking upon the foaming billows, reeled, and began to sink, so was it with their faith. "Oh that He would but present Himself but once to us," say they, "and all doubt would be dissipated!" And as they are thus thinking, what happens? Suddenly a friendly greeting, with no ordinary intonation, is addressed to them. Startled, they turn round, and—oh the astonishment!—there He stands before their eyes;—yes, He himself, all radiant with circumambient glory! They fall prostrate at His feet in adoration; inward amazement holds the balance between transport and joy. How could it be otherwise? What an exalted personage have they before them now in the Risen One! He no longer represents a divinely-accredited prophet *announcing* God's judgments, nor the mere Saviour of sinners, who, after His work had



been perfectly finished, was crowned by His Father with glory and honour,—but in the character and glory of Him who was at once manifested as the only-begotten Son of the living God, and actually the King of glory exalted to the throne of the universe. Is it, therefore, any marvel that the first impression which His reappearance created in them was an almost bewildering and prostrating one? The Lord, however, hastens to reassure their agitation. And how does He calm their minds? Does He endeavour in some way to lower the tone of their conceptions of the superhuman dignity of His person, and of the unbounded importance of His resurrection, as too bold and unmeasured? No! far from that. He knew Himself, with the most perfect distinctness, to be not only the Person whose whole doctrine was authenticated by the seal of the Most High confirming it with a world-wide splendour, and whose work of salvation was ratified to endless ages by the Amen from above; but to be Him whom the heavenly Father had adorned, in the face of heaven, earth, and hell, with a diadem as King of kings and Lord of lords, and whom He had, in the most solemn manner, proclaimed and placed before the sight of a redeemed world as the conqueror of sin, death, and the devil. Accordingly He does not forbid the women to render the worship which they offer Him, though He controls the anxious tremor which His presence and majesty impose. “Fear not!” says He to them. That “Fear not!” which first resounded at His birth from angel lips, received at this moment its first full confirmation. Why should they fear any longer, now that the crowned Head of all principalities and powers is, at the same time, the Saviour of sinners; and that the glory awarded Him was so less as to the eternal Son than in a special and more peculiar manner to the Son of man, who interposed in our stead, and acquired the full right to lead the people whom He had redeemed with



His blood, ever henceforth wielding over them the sceptre of grace and condescension?

It may seem remarkable that our Lord, on this occasion, permits the women to do that which, with His "*Touch me not!*" He had forbidden to Mary Magdalene. But He is "*the Searcher of hearts,*" and weighs the mind and disposition in His own balances. The feelings with which the women in the place cited from the Gospel before us fall before Him, were different from those by which Mary Magdalene was moved when she addressed Him. Theirs were feelings of the most reverential worship demonstrated before the face of the glorified God-man; whilst Mary's feelings were those of passionate joy at the human reappearance of her Saviour and Protector. Mary needed, therefore, an elevation to higher spiritual views of the future relation of the redeemed to their glorified Mediator; whilst these needed, above everything, a confirmation that they really saw in Him the same Lord and Master bodily before them whom they had carried to the sepulchre three days previously, and not an appearance from another world. Such tender consideration is vouchsafed by the Lord to His people with reference to their peculiar idiosyncrasies; He does not rule them by any rigid plan, but tempers His dealings by a regard to their peculiar dispositions and their most inward necessities. Hence the great variety in the leadings of His providence with believers, whilst their inward principle is one and the same. He, however, brings them all, though each one by a different path, through a course of humiliation, of inward mortification, and of continuous growth in Him who is the Head. To this the apostle Paul refers in Eph. iii. 10, where he speaks of "*the manifold wisdom of God being made known to the church.*"

Our Lord connects with His encouraging address, "Be not afraid," the commission, "*Go tell my brethren, that they*



*go into Galilee, and there shall they see me."* A glorious mission which He confided to them! Whilst some will think, "Alas! but to whom was the post of ambassador committed?" But this hypocritical "Alas!" condemns the man who utters it, for it shews him to be but a pitiable victim of the evil spirit of unbelief, which governs and fetters our self-deluded age. For has it to-day ceased to be an historical fact, that One came, who nailed our bond with its obligations to the cross, who disarmed death for us, and brought life and immortality to light? I may almost say that it is more so now than it formerly was, since it has been maintained eighteen hundred years in the experience of the best and noblest of the sons of earth, and has thoroughly vanquished all the cavils of sophistical philosophy. But what prevents us from appropriating to ourselves the blessed message which the women were to publish? Nothing but a wretched and wholly inexcusable *unbelief*, by which we wilfully rob ourselves of precious treasure. But, God be praised, we have not all done so. On the contrary, there are not a few amongst us who, by the Lord's mercy, can utter with full emphasis that passage of the poet—

"Oh, into every highway haste  
To call the wanderers home;  
With outstretch'd hand and joyous voice  
Invite them all to come.

"For now 'tis heaven on earth with us,  
Bid sinners all draw near;  
And if they will with us believe,  
A welcome waits them here."

The women, in a joyous transport, promptly hasten to execute the delightful command of their risen Master. Indeed, they have little more to announce to the disciples than the authentic, joyous intelligence that the Lord is really risen from the dead. They were sensible of the high and blissful



importance of His resurrection, but their conceptions of it were confused and unsettled. It was not until after Pentecost that clearness and light came to their relief, and raised their twilight to bright broad day. How many are there who now live in a frame of mind analogous to that of the women at this time. A lively anticipation of the exaltation of Christ, of the blessedness of a life in communion with Him, pervades their hearts, whilst they do not definitely and clearly realise what is involved in their relation to Him. This was at first to them like an object but faintly seen in the distance. Their state may, at least in some respects, be compared with that which befell Paul, when, near Damascus, the light from heaven shone round about him, and the Lord first appeared to him in glory, but at a distance. They need that something similar betide them, which subsequently occurred to the same apostle, when, upon Ananias laying his hands upon his eyes, the scales fell from them, and he then, filled with the Holy Ghost, saw clearly in every direction what a fulness of salvation and life was treasured up in Christ.

It is easy to divine what motive determined the Risen One to assign Galilee as a rendezvous for His disciples, and as the theatre upon which He purposed still further to reveal Himself. Irrespective of the fact that Galilee was the land of His youth, whilst Judea was only that of His nativity, Galilee remained, in a peculiar and nearer sense, His native country, for He had found greater susceptibility for the reception of the salvation which He brought amongst the Galileans, (a frequently misjudged people, and who, on account of their being a more mixed race, and their greater intercourse with foreigners, were esteemed a nation of heretics,) than amongst the inhabitants of Judea, wholly under the influence of Pharisees and scribes. With the exception of those occasions on which He went up to Jeru-



salem to the feasts, Christ had restricted both His teaching and His miracles to Galilee ; and as His twelve apostles were all Galileans, so likewise were the great majority of His other disciples. What wonder, therefore, that He likewise selected Galilee for the site of the celebration of His great victory, and that He thereby practically confirmed the subsequent dictum of His apostle, "that base things of the world hath God chosen," (1 Cor. i. 28.)

II. It would seem that the joyous message delivered by the women proved inadequate thoroughly to convince the disciples of the reality of the resurrection. For when they, in the afternoon of the great day, were hailed by the two disciples who had been to Emmaus, with the jubilant exclamation, "The Lord is risen indeed!" they appealed for the truth of the joyful news, not to the testimony of the women, but only to that of Peter. "He has appeared to Peter," said they. What was it, however, that inclined them to attach such great credit to Peter's evidence? For this brother had not hitherto given any extraordinary proofs of discretion, moderation, and keenness of judgment. But they had seen him in poignant grief and contrition at his fall, and knew that he would then accept consolation from no quarter ; but that now he was suddenly the subject of consolation so powerful that it found expression in his countenance, which beamed with joy,—the only assigned cause for the change being, as he assured them, the fact that the Lord had appeared to him, and had Himself pardoned his offence, after which they had no longer any reason to doubt of it. His eyes sparkling with joy vouched to them the truth that the Lord is alive again ; for it would have been utterly inconceivable by them that Peter could have allowed himself to be comforted and set at ease by any mere phantom, or by any illusory appearance.

The Gospel does not tell us when or where the Lord ap-



peared to Peter on the day of His resurrection. It is known with what tender precaution the Risen One had by the angel instructed the women, when at the empty sepulchre, to notify to Peter that his Master was alive again, before they did so to the others,—whence the disciple might draw the comfortable conclusion that the Lord was again kindly disposed to him; and the apostle was now at least so prepared for a personal interview with the Risen One, that, whenever it actually took place, it could no longer overwhelm him with stupifying and prostrating amazement. We have already seen him, much more terrified than cheered by Mary Magdalene's notification, hurry away to Joseph's garden, but there again, sorely disappointed, return from it to Jerusalem. And he may possibly just have arrived there when the other female disciples appeared, and delivered their message. Now, I imagine that Peter may have again started on the road to the holy sepulchre, and that it was on this second journey that the Lord revealed Himself to him.

How willingly would we have the veil raised from this appearance of the risen Saviour! But scenes transpire in the kingdom of God, the exceedingly tender, sacred, and heavenly nature of which wholly defy representation or communication; nay, which cannot be laid bare to vulgar, mortal sight, without actually damaging to some extent the glorious enamel, as it were, with which they are covered. The first meeting of our Lord with His intensely grieved and contrite Peter must have been a scene of this kind. Let us, therefore, not presume to attempt a description of it. If He do not Himself narrate it to us, the angels, who witnessed it with emotion, will one day do so in heaven. Suffice it, the Prince of Peace has, with ineffable kindness, wiped away the tears from the eyes of His deeply agitated disciple lying there before Him in the dust, and has hailed him, no less solemnly than condescendingly, with His resur-



rection (Easter) benediction, "Peace be unto you!" and that with an intonation which still echoes blissfully in the disciple's soul to this hour. Peter rose, from that most glorious moment of his earthly existence, as if born anew, or rather as if raised from death to life. It must remain an unsettled point, whether he were at that time fully and clearly informed upon what ground the Lord had granted him absolute forgiveness. But he implicitly confided in the simple assurance of lips from which a falsehood had never proceeded. And although the mysterious connexion between his Master's absolution and His bloody passion had not been fully manifested to him, since the day of Pentecost was not yet arrived, he knew, nevertheless, that he had received mercy, that he was pardoned. But when he subsequently wrote his epistle, the ground of his final justification before God was no longer a mystery to him. For then he could with full utterance announce to the brethren, "Ye are redeemed, not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." "Christ," he declared, "has himself borne our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, who are dead to sin, should live to righteousness. By his wounds ye are healed." From this moment the full importance of the resurrection of Jesus, in every point of view, was disclosed to him. "Through the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ," he writes, "God has of his abundant mercy begotten us again unto a lively hope;" and he indicates the resurrection of Christ as the foundation for "the answer of a good conscience towards God." Now, it was clear to him, and he was perfectly conscious of the fact, that the Mediator having been raised by the Father, he, the sinner, was proved to be justified, Christ having voluntarily assumed his sins,—that Jesus had received solemn testimony from His Father that His priestly, vicarious work was perfectly finished, approved,



and accepted by Him. Beyond all question it was now valid for Peter, since the justification of the Surety extended to the whole body of the redeemed, for it was their debts which He, on their behalf, had paid, and their sins which He expiated, and for which He gave satisfaction to the Majesty on high.

The resurrection of the Lord is but seldom estimated now-a-days by Christians as of this high importance, although God's Word distinctly attaches to it the very greatest weight. Paul, for example, when he triumphantly exclaims, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died;" then immediately adds, with great emphasis, "*yea rather, that is risen again.*" And it will no longer appear enigmatical to us why he so specially reposes his consciousness of not being obnoxious to condemnation upon Christ's resurrection. The acquittance, if I may so speak, which the Almighty granted by the resurrection to the Son as to the debts discharged by Him, was placed to the credit of the apostle, as it likewise was to that of all those who through faith should become one with the Son, this second Adam. The payment itself, indeed, was made upon the cross, but the actual declaration that it was acknowledged as perfectly valid and accepted on the Most High, this was first shewn to a sinful world on Easter-day. It is said in Scripture that "Christ died for our sins, and rose again for our justification,"—(that is to say, as a proof that God has acquitted us of our debt, and beholds us as righteous in Him.)

Oh, let not, then, this strong consolation of the resurrection be to any one of us like a treasure hidden in a field, as is, alas! the case with so many at this time, and seems likely to continue so. The way to the attainment of the incomparable peace-inspiring treasure, is the same which Peter trod. In the first place, we tread that way when we get a thorough knowledge of our natural alienation from God:



we tread that way when we absolutely condemn self; we tread that way when we feel utterly ashamed of all our self-righteousness. If we once travel on that road which leads to utter repudiation of self, then a mere general notion that we may reckon on God's grace, exhibited for Christ's sake, will prove insufficient to give us peace. We inquire upon what grounds the expectation rests, and shall most certainly not declare ourselves satisfied, until we have both document and seal to shew that our heavenly Advocate has triumphantly carried our suit before that throne whose foundations are justice and judgment. But His glorious resurrection gives us this guarantee. The apostle says, "If Christ be not raised, ye are yet in your sins." What is deducible from this? Nothing less than that, since He is risen, we, provided we may assume that we are numbered amongst His people, are, with reference to the tribunal of God, free, and discharged from our sins. What a disclosure is this! The Lord give it a living and clear echo in our hearts, and help us with the whole heart to unite in the old Easter-song of the Church:—

"Christ the Lord is risen again!  
 Christ hath broken every chain!  
 Hark! the angels shout for joy,  
 Singing evermore on high,  
                   Hallelujah!

"He who slumber'd in the grave  
 Is exalted now to save;  
 Now through Christendom it rings  
 That the Lamb is King of kings!  
                   Hallelujah!

"Now He bids us tell abroad  
 How the lost may be restored,  
 How the penitent forgiven,  
 How we too may enter heaven.  
                   Hallelujah!"

*Lyra Germanica.*



## VI.

## THE DISCIPLES AT EMMAUS.

## FIRST MEDITATION.

“BLESSED are the eyes which see the things that ye see! for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.” This saying of our Lord (Luke x. 23, 24) is well known to you. May its application, in the whole breadth of its meaning, be realised by all of you! Nevertheless, how many born in Christendom know as yet nothing of the new glorious kingdom, which is erected by God’s grace within the old one! Separated from the other, as it were, by a wall as high as heaven, they still live in this one as they previously did, as if every other were but a dream, and though delightful, yet the offspring of delusion. They make their way through the gloom of the valley of tears, having the fetters of a worldly spirit riveted upon them, “nay, sold under sin,” and “through fear of death they remain all their lives long subject to bondage;” whilst others, their immediate neighbours, as children of God, and freemen, journey through life with blissful hopes, and in sunshine, and exultingly triumph over death, the devil, and every other hostile power, as over enemies beaten and for ever disarmed. Does a world really exist where such a triumph



would be authorised, and is it, not a beautiful land of dreams, but an actual and permanent abode? But who needs still to propose such a question as this? The passage upon which we are just about to meditate, excellent beyond all comparison, will so elevate you, that, looking over the wall of partition, you may have a glimpse of the brighter world beyond, and it will, at the same time, should you desire it, point out the safe way by which you yourself may arrive there.

## LUKE xxiv. 13-35.

“And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to-day is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre: and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so-as the women had said: but him they saw not. Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further. But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us; for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were



opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread."

Without this gospel, no Easter! But like nature in returning spring ever renewing itself, and like the starry vault of heaven, which discloses fresh splendour to the eye that continues to gaze on it, so this passage of Scripture is suggestive of fresh and varied thought. The fragrance of inward truth which exhales to us from it, by which it interests us so delightfully, and operates upon us with such wonderful benefit, is an antidote to every enfeebling doubt; above all, we are struck with the clear view it grants us of the new spiritual world which Christ has planted in the old world of death, and the distinctness with which it lays open the way by which we may see an entrance possible for ourselves into this world of peace. Let us take this pleasing narrative into closer consideration, and let us, in spirit, accompany the two disciples in their blessed journey. At first they appear to us involved in a night *which, if Easter-day had not risen, would have enshrouded us all; we then find them in the dawn of transition from this starless darkness into the bright lovely scenes of Easter; and, finally, in the full noontide splendour of the Easter Sun.* Every one of us may see himself, and the reflected image of his own inward state, in the two disciples, at one stage or other of their journey. May the *last* stage we have indicated be the lot of all of us, and then what happiness will be ours!

Our narrative transports us to the afternoon of the day of the resurrection. We are at Jerusalem. The city is in great commotion. Priests and scribes are hastening from house to



house, to give consistency to the report that the disciples of the crucified Galilean had, during the last night, secretly broken into Joseph's garden, and whilst the guard slept had stolen their Master's corpse, and concealed it in some unknown place. The small body of disciples of the Crucified, dispersed by the horrors and terrors of the blood-stained Friday, are reassembled, but in small desponding groups. We meet them just as they are excited to the utmost by the declaration of the women, who insist that they have seen a vision of angels, and to crown that, they protest that they have even been favoured with an interview with their Risen Master. This intelligence has produced upon them rather a passing amazement than any real comfort and tranquillity. They ascribe this consoling communication to the excited fancy of their credulous sisters, and even the hearts of the more susceptible among them oscillate between deep gloom and faint trembling hope. Some of them, and Thomas is of this number, have, with perfect resignation, retired into solitude. The two with whom we are now engaged, and who, doubtless, are numbered amongst the seventy, are just about to do the same. Prostrated, and well nigh in despair, because they consider themselves, to have made shipwreck of all their hopes for time and for eternity, they return to their homes in the village of Emmaus, in order to prosecute their usual avocations as soon as their spirits would permit them. But why in such haste? Why not first put the women's declaration to the test? Why is the circumstance, that the linen clothes and the napkin were found by Peter and John, upon their arrival at the empty sepulchre, carefully folded and laid aside, not more narrowly scanned? And above all, why was not the "*word of prophecy*" interrogated as to the course of life and mode of death of the promised Messiah? and then why were the tablets of their memory, inscribed as they were with the early expressions of their



Master, not searched for intimations of His death and resurrection? Why had they already seceded from the circle over which the promise hovered—"I will not leave you orphans; I will come again unto you?" Oh! how often might we now stop many amongst us in their way and put similar questions: Why in such haste? Why so soon? when we see them yielding to the objections of a sceptical worldly-wisdom, desert their colours, surrender the gospel cause, and retreat into the camp of the unbelievers. If these unhappy persons would but give themselves time and opportunity for closer examination and investigation, assuredly they would, by degrees, be perfectly convinced that those discoveries which, emanating from a so-called "advanced mental culture," whether in natural science, history, or criticism, had been announced to threaten the continued existence of Christianity, are not actually so dangerous as popular clamour would fain have them esteemed. They unwisely conclude that they must yield the field to armed hosts, and flee before mere phantoms and airy forms, which, before the torch of a closer examination, resolve themselves into mere vapour.

Thus, upon the loveliest day which ever lightened the world, our two disciples are groping as in the gloom of night. It is true, they were not distinctly conscious of the extent of the loss they had sustained in being deprived of their Master; but they *felt* what they did not clearly *know*, and experienced most sensibly the truth of the apostle's declaration, "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins;" and, "then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished," (1 Cor. xv. 17, 18.) Who now stands surety for them, that God will accept the sinner, and exercise grace and not justice? Without an intercessor, without a mediator, without a saviour, they see themselves cast upon their own resources. Without mast and without rudder, their little bark of life is fast drifting among the



breakers. Where shall it gain the shore? who shall preserve it from total shipwreck? He is no longer at the helm on whom all their hopes leaned; He has ceased to be their Advocate with God; He will no longer prepare them mansions in heaven; nor, when their last hour shall strike, will He invest them with that wedding garment of righteousness in which they may securely abide the judgment. Oh, how wretched are these two orphan souls, so severely smitten, so deeply impoverished! But are you less so, though you do not yet feel it so profoundly,—you who have permanently, deliberately resigned yourselves to that unbelief into which these fell, but for a moment, through weakness? Oh, certainly not! you are utterly stripped of hope, and more justly, because you belong to an age of higher mental culture. It cannot have escaped you that the wisdom of the natural understanding, with all the expenditure of its investigations and labour of thought, exercised during thousands of years up to the present hour, upon the real destiny of man, and especially upon his existence after death, has brought to light no reliable result. The two disciples philosophise justly when they resolve, “If Christ be held by death, then the aim and end of human life is fixed on this side the grave.” Oh, my friends, do not deceive yourselves! All that you are wont to inscribe, for your own consolation, upon the tombs of your departed loved ones, of their being gone home, of glory, of heavenly crowns, and of meeting again, all this falls irrecoverably away like the “baseless fabric of a vision” with the removal of that pillar upon which alone it rests securely—the *historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus*. With the denial of the miraculous event of Easter, the brightest star in the firmament of life is extinguished—the star of hope; and no Plato, no Aristotle, nor any other of the wise men of this world, no matter with how many laurel wreaths fame may have encircled his name,



is able to rekindle its splendour. But how comes it to pass that they who set their sails full in the gale of unbelief do not go through life, like the disciples of Emmaus, sighing with downcast heads? Because for a while they succeed in busying themselves in the element of the temporal and perishable, and in forcibly ejecting from their minds all anxiety respecting the world beyond. Only wait a while; for them also dark cloudy days are in store, since they must needs confirm in their own experience the truth, that where there is no Lord of the resurrection, there night reigns, and man must pass through a desert of inconsolable despair.

But to return to our pilgrims;—there they go! The hilly road to Emmaus brings them near the tombs of the Judges. “Ye ancient heroes,” might they say to themselves, “full many a year have ye lain there! But *do ye sleep in hope?* Who is there now to assure you that you do so?” Throughout their journey, nature presented herself to the two travellers in all the glory and beauty of spring. But smiling nature only discovers her charms to the cheerful, whilst she leaves the afflicted still disconsolate. But it must not escape us that a few rays of comfort, as if from some distant star twinkling before their tearful vision, slightly lessened their mental darkness. These rays emanated partly from the message brought by their dearly-loved sisters, though their reception of it was mingled with so many doubts, and partly from their not having wholly forgotten their Master’s declaration with reference to the reconstruction of the temple on the third day after it had been broken in pieces by the hands of His adversaries, (John ii. 19;) but, above all, from the sublime figure of the Master himself, which they could not recall without the question forcing itself on their attention, whether it were possible to conceive that God, the holy and righteous, should really have given up this, His obedient, sinless, and wholly blameless One,



abandoning Him as a permanent prey to death. And does not the same experience occur at times to unbelievers even now? Do they not see, darting suddenly through the night in which they walk, flashes of lightning which reveal to them, momentarily at least, the superhuman majesty and glory of Jesus Christ? When a lively recollection awakens up within them how *that* Christ, of whom they desire to know nothing, has conquered the world, and impressed it with an essentially different form,—when as from one mighty choir all the jubilant shouts of the believing hosts, who through faith have, during eighteen centuries, vanquished the world, sin, distress, and death, strike upon their ears,—when their eye settles upon the interminable line of honourable monuments which, in the form of temples, charitable institutions, works of artistic genius, and every other tribute of grateful affection, have been raised to that “Son of man” by those who, living and dying, had in Him found peace,—or occasionally when the churches, by their holiday chimes, seem to say, “Behold millions throughout the world crowding our gates, either with a clearly-defined purpose, or from involuntary habit, to join those who with songs of praise and homage bow the knee in worship to Him who lay in the cradle, hung on the cross, and burst the bands of the grave;”—does not sheet-lightning from the highest heavens at such a moment blaze upon the infidel darkness of the deniers of the Bible and of Christ, forcing on them a conviction of the superhuman majesty of the Lord Jesus, and strong enough at least to rob them of every ground of excuse for a fresh relapse into their old unbelief?

But let us listen to the dialogue of our two travellers. It is, on the one hand, affecting to notice how zealously they are engaged in reconstructing, if possible, the mansion of peace, laid in ruins by their Master’s death, in which they had been so happy: and, on the other hand, how from fear



of renewed, and therefore more painful illusion, they strive against any incipient hope, as soon as it is presented to their consciousness; and how, even in spite of their own better convictions, they wilfully reject the message from the tomb brought by the women, and try to pronounce *that* to be in some way a natural appearance, which the apostles declared that they had seen there. Would that all who do not believe now, should find themselves similarly disposed, so that the still prevailing scepticism within them should be accompanied by a sufficient love to gospel truth to waken up solicitude, lest a notion so eagerly embraced should subsequently prove but a mere delusion! We might then announce to them with all confidence that the hour was not far distant when, having overcome all the stumbling-blocks in their way to the kingdom of God, and perfectly assured of their interest therein, they would at length enter it rejoicing and exulting. But to the majority of our unbelievers that plaintive as well as complaining utterance of our Lord, with reference to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, is, alas! more applicable, "How would I have gathered thee as a hen her chickens under her wings, but ye would not!"

II. A strong sensation of pleasure pervaded the minds of the two pilgrims at the thought that their Master, really raised to life, might meet them again. But they seek, as has been suggested, energetically to ward off such a delightful idea, as being only too well calculated to render them doubly sensible of their desperate condition. They walk on, overpowered and benighted by the dark imagery of the crucifixion. When, lo! a third person, with friendly salutation, suddenly joins them. They return his greeting, and hastily scan him from head to foot, but without recognition; they suppose that he is one of the pilgrims who had been up to the feast, and is now returning home from Jerusalem. It had been so ordered that they should not yet know him.



For the wisest of purposes, "their eyes were holden," (Luke xxiv. 16.) Yes, *theirs* were; but why not *ours* also? With throbbing hearts we chant our Easter Hallelujah to the veiled Stranger. All our salvation, all our hope, rests upon this Man, as we see Him there, standing before us in His new life. Suppose Him withdrawn, and there we are forlorn and with no security for our future destiny. But who can be unaffected by the Shepherd's faithfulness, which has impelled Him in this instance to follow these two scattered sheep of His fold! Oh, how frequently is this confession heard in the circle of believers: "Long ere I knew Him, He condescendingly followed me, woke me out of my dreary state at such a spot, with His saving hand drew me back, with His gentle voice warned me of the impending abyss. At one time He sent me an angel as a companion in the guise of a friend; at another He placed a book or letter in my hand which recalled me to my senses just at the right moment; again by some incident He constrained me to reflect upon the nothingness of all worldly objects; by some event or other He intelligibly appealed to me by name." You honest doubters, who really thirst after truth, when you shall come to the knowledge of it, will recognise *His* footsteps everywhere throughout your past career, "who came to seek and to save that which was lost," and you will from your own experience be able to confirm the saying that He is truly one who "will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax."

In order to open the conversation, the stranger asks the kind and sympathetic question, what they are so earnestly conversing about on the way, and why they are so cast down and sorrowful. The manner in which they open their hearts to him and begin to relate their whole sad story, is quite affecting. Indeed, they can scarcely forbear expressing some degree of vexation that their companion should be the only



one of all those who had come to Jerusalem to the feast that knew nothing of what had occurred during the last few days. And who would blame them for wondering at this? In the account which they give, they call their Master "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people." This was but an inadequate confession of their great Master; still we note with joy this their description of His appearance. They thus attest from their own experience, not only the publicity, but also the reality of His miracles. We also hear with delight the words, "But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." For whatever may have been their conception of redemption, the great hopes which they entertained of their Lord give us a sure indication of the superhuman majesty by which they must have seen Him surrounded, even whilst He still lived in the form of a servant. Further, it is of importance to note that they unwittingly confirm the saying of the women, concerning the appearance of the angels at the empty grave of Him who "was delivered up by the chief priests and scribes to death," and that they evidently know something of "a third day" and its associated hopes. Therefore, that which *they* assign to be the subject and cause of their *sorrow* conduces only to strengthen and confirm our belief, and we gladly accept them as two important witnesses to the truth of the gospel, despite their own unwarrantable doubts. It is for this reason that their unknown companion does not interrupt them in the outpouring of their hearts. Even in that which is apparently a testimony against their Master, they thus only witnessed for Him, and defended His honour. But when they had unburdened their hearts, the stranger considers it time for him to break silence, and at once to awaken the sorrowing ones from their melancholy and idle fancies. But what proceeds from his lips? Is it some word of tender sympathy or of compassionate encour-



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cal harmonies, elsewhere entirely unknown! And then that sublime plan of redemption, disclosed to us by these witnesses of the Spirit; and the adorable, unchanging faithfulness with which God conducts His sublime purpose to its final completion! On the entrance of sin into the world, the curse is fulminated; but, at the same time, in order to incline the hearts of the fallen ones to return to the Lord, there is the promise of grace and of divine forgiveness. Then when, despite this warning, the stream of corruption rose higher and higher, a peculiar people is selected to carry down the revelation of the means of salvation for a world, which, without such provision, would have perished. The careful, providential mode in which this elect nation is led, disciplined at one time by severity and at another by clemency; the awakening of their consciences to a sense of guilt by the delivery of the law at Sinai; and then the ever-increasing definiteness of the promises of redemption, by means of symbols, of typical personalities, of transparent and unequivocal prophetic utterances,—setting forth with augmenting clearness and completeness the exalted person of the great Messiah, who Himself should bring in the redemption. This Saviour rises before us, as a child, bearing the titles of “Prince of Peace” and of “The Eternal Father;” as a “Priest-king,” whom David calls his Lord; as a “comforter of all who mourn,” a “deliverer of them that are bound;” as the “Lamb of God,” who bears the sins of the world; as a hero who rescues the prey from the old serpent, the arch-enemy of God and man, whom He treads under foot. The mirror of prophecy represents Him as authenticating His divine mission by signs and wonders; as the Good Shepherd who goes after His lost sheep; as giving His life as a sacrifice for them; as having been taken from judgment, and crowned with honour and glory; as living evermore, and claiming the nations for His inheritance. Ages



before His appearing He was already known, as if He had been already seen upon earth. And when, at length, He really does appear, prophecy and fulfilment, type and anti-type agree, not only in the main and essential features, but also in the most minute incidents. Could this comport with the natural course of things? By no means! Here is most obviously the direct hand of that God who immediately interferes with and manages all things. Sceptic! turn to the Sacred Scriptures; thou groper in darkness, intently study them,—so shalt thou soon see the morning dawn over thy head, as it did over those two disciples, when the Unknown One, walking with them in the way, led them in spirit through Moses and the prophets, and from their prophecies declared to them the future mighty “Prince of Peace.”

III. Let us accompany them further. Who can describe their agitation of mind? They can no longer question, even for a moment, that their crucified Master is other than the Redeemer of the world, described by and prefigured in Moses and the prophets. Everything, from the cradle to the cross, was fulfilled in Him to the letter. But does this fulfilment cease at the crucifixion? Is there no further coincidence? Should there not be a keystone, and is this keystone wanting? Does this pyramid of life want the topmost stone? Does the healthy, vigorous tree, instead of developing its leafy crown, abruptly terminate in a stump? To the two disciples this appeared inconceivable. Hope revives within them. Of a truth, every line of the picture in their memories, stroke for stroke, had been reproduced in Him. And shall the last, the only remaining feature,—that of victory over death in the resurrection,—be alone wanting? If death held Him, where then was the body? They, the disciples, had not carried it away. Had His enemies, perhaps, done so? Impossible! For had He been in their hands, would



they not publicly have exhibited the corpse, and have triumphed, saying, "See! here is your vaunted Prince of Peace, on whom all your hopes are fixed." These thoughts, or similar ones, may have been weighed one after another in the mental scales of the good men, and we understand what they mean when we afterwards hear them say, "Did not our hearts burn within us, while He talked with us by the way?"

They arrive at Emmaus. The Unknown made as though He would go further and part from them; but their fervent wish is that He should not, and they begin to beg and constrain Him, saying, "*Abide with us, for it is towards evening, and the day is far spent.*" Who is not familiar with this earnest request, this pathetic appeal, which, though not always rightly understood, finds an echo in the hearts of all who ever heard it? It contains incomparably more than the words seem to express. This was no secret to their companion. It was whilst they walked with Him, and He led them through the writings of Moses and the prophets, that they first became convinced how imperatively poor sinners like themselves, condemned by the law, needed a Saviour, a propitiator, and an intercessor between them and the Lord God. But what if a more blessed thing still could happen to them, if their unknown friend had also in reserve for them *the* message that their Master really was alive again? The very thought of this might make them shout aloud for joy. Heaven is opened to them by this possibility. For then their Jesus would really be the Saviour whom they needed. Then, before the whole world, the everlasting Father would have accredited and crowned Him in this character. Then neither Moses, nor Satan, nor their own conscience could accuse them any more. They saw themselves "accepted of God in the beloved." What an intimate friend would then have been restored to them in Him! what a surety, not only for their personal existence after death, but also for their



future glorious change and exaltation in their Father's house! Do you still wonder that you hear them intreat so urgently, so pressingly, "Abide with us, abide with us?" Learn from this why the eyes of the disciples were "holden that they should not know Him." What would it have profited them if their companion had revealed Himself to them when they first met? Truly they would have been overwhelmed with joyous astonishment, but it would have been astonishment without light and without clearness of apprehension. They would have hailed their risen Saviour vehemently, exultingly, but they would not have had any just appreciation of the real import of His resurrection. Meeting them, as He now does, after they have been enlightened by the word of God, they know what they have in Him; their joy has a firm foundation; their rejoicing has a well-defined object.

"Abide with us." These words bespeak blissful anticipation and expectation; we see in them the first blush of that spiritual dawn which rose upon their minds towards the end of their walk, and preluded the glorious noon-tide of Easter-day. You are now in a position to appreciate the joy of the disciples when the companion who joined them on the way yields to their entreaties to stay. They take Him to a rustic cottage, the home of one of them, and, bidding Him a hearty welcome there, hasten to prepare a simple meal. When the table is spread, and they are all seated around it, the guest rises to officiate as master of the house. "Oh," they both think, "that is just as *He* used to do when He lived and walked with us." But they do not yet perceive who it is that is standing before them. He takes the bread. What sorrowful but sweet recollections arise in their souls at the sight! He gives thanks. What do they then experience? do they dream? The tone! the spirit! the unction!—all, *all* are just as *He* used to pray! He breaks the bread—exactly so *He* was wont to do! He offers it to them; but



let others take it. They stand as though petrified ; for all of a sudden their eyes have been opened—"Yes, it is *He!*" it is He himself—"Assuredly He lives." They are in the act of prostrating themselves and clasping His feet ; but they may no longer do so. Their previous intercourse with Him now yields to another higher and more spiritual. Ere they could realise the fact, the risen glorified Messiah, for it was He, had vanished out of their sight. But why had they not long previously divined who it was that had borne them company ? They cannot even account for it themselves. "*Did not our hearts burn within us,*" we hear them cry, "*while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?*" But now, without a moment's delay, they hasten through the still night on the wings of joy back again to Jerusalem. In what different terms do they now hail the sepulchre of the ancient judges from those in which, when passing, they saluted it as they sallied forth from the city ; and in what a totally different light does the whole world appear to them now, though still outwardly sunless, for the Risen One is henceforth their Sun ! Arriving at Jerusalem, they go to the house of John ; they no sooner join the circle of the disciples there than they are greeted with the joyful exclamation, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." The two highly-favoured ones can confirm this triumphant testimony by what they have both seen and heard. Every countenance beams with overflowing joy. But after their surging feelings had somewhat subsided, the brethren from Emmaus had to narrate what they had experienced, and they related most minutely all that had happened to them on their homeward journey, and "how He was known of them in breaking of bread."

Thus have our two pilgrims entered the glorious sun-illuminated Easter world, where death has lost its sting, where the head of the old serpent is crushed, the paradisaical



sonship to God is renewed, and the Angel of Hope again consoles the child of the dust, as he walks by his side. Blessed indeed are all they for whom a place is prepared in this world, illumined by the Easter Sun! And such a place is open to you all! From the depths of your soul, let such a prayer rise as that of the disciples of Emmaus; because it is likewise night with you, and then the sun of a false peace and of an imaginary security will hasten to decline. In the breaking of the heavenly bread of inward peace with God by Him, you would recognise in Him your only Saviour, and the author of your bliss. And if you did but learn, from the deepest inmost conviction of your heart, to say with the patriarch, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," you would immediately, like him, be raised above the mighty ones of this earth, and would unite triumphantly in the old Easter hymn:—

"On this day, most blest of days!  
Let us keep high festival,  
For our God hath shew'd His grace,  
And our Sun hath risen on all,  
And our hearts rejoice to see  
Sin and night before Him flee.  
Hallelujah!"

*Luther, translated by Miss Winkworth.*



## VII.

## THE DISCIPLES AT EMMAUS.

## SECOND MEDITATION.

HIGH up the Missouri river in North America, just beyond all the settlements, and where a vast tract of country is as yet undisturbed in its primeval state, there is a double signpost standing in a boundless prairie. It indicates on one of its arms, "To Mexico," on the other, "To California." How many a wanderer, following one or other of these waymarks, has been lost, and has perished in the pathless, unpeopled wilderness for want of signposts further on! The ministers of the Word would be like that signpost, if they contented themselves by calling out in general terms, "Ye must repent and believe, if ye would attain eternal life." Their duty is rather to raise signposts here and there on the road to safety and to heaven, and with the prophet (Isa. xxx. 21) to declare unto you, "This is the way, walk ye in it, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left." The peerless Gospel of Easter-day, which we are now about to consider for the second time, is in itself a sufficient guide, shewing practically, step by step, the way of salvation, with such accuracy that whoever does not wilfully blind himself, cannot overlook, mistake, or miss it.

LUKE xxiv. 13-34.

Let us return once more to this beloved Gospel; but



not as if we deemed it possible to exhaust the fulness of thought contained in it, for it is inexhaustible; but simply because we wish to bring nearer to your understandings, as well as to your hearts, several topics upon which we could touch but slightly in our first meditation. To carry this out, let us in the first place see *who there is amongst us whose tone of mind corresponds with that exhibited by the disciples of Emmaus*; secondly, *in what manner there may be an essential coincidence of experience in that which may betide us in our path of life, and in that which occurred to the two travellers on theirs to Emmaus*; and, thirdly, *when the moment arrives, that it may also be justly said of us, that the Easter sun is risen upon us.*

Oh, that whilst thus mutually engaged, this Sun would burst forth upon us with His blissful heavenly rays!

I. The two disciples, whom we see leave Jerusalem late in the afternoon of the day of the resurrection, had suffered shipwreck in their faith. Unhappily we meet in the present day with many who resemble them in their experience and its results. Since the two disciples had seen their Master grow pale in death, it seems as though they had for ever given up His cause, with all the comfort also which they had derived from it, and all the hopes which they had based upon it. Alas, thousands in our own day might say to them, "We have done that long ago." But among those who have fallen away to unbelief, important differences exist. There are, in the first place, numbers who never did believe. Pious parents have never raised the tiny hands of these pitiable ones in prayer. The well-known verse—

"Expand Thy wings, O Jesus!  
And nestle me, Thy little one,"

has never sounded from their lips. Perhaps at school they heard this and that about Jesus, about His teaching and His miracles;



but probably, what they did hear of Him came to them only in a diluted or stunted form, or only as a mere letter without spirit and life. It did not warm their hearts ; it did not kindle within them a longing for a nearer view and a more living apprehension. It awakened no blissful anticipation in them, like that which elicited the exclamation from the man in the Gospel, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." From their infancy upwards they have never known any other kingdom than the kingdom of this world, where no interest scarcely is felt beyond the trivial matters, "What shall we eat ? what shall we drink ? or wherewithal shall we be clothed ?" These spiritually-neglected ones, to whose worldly, prejudiced consciousness the gospel is as though it were not, and who have no idea of the splendour of that world of glory which Christ has revealed to His people, wholly differ in their moral bias from the disciples of Emmaus, and we can only commend them to Almighty God, and intreat for them His free grace. Others, indeed, have once had a holier, happier time, though only in childhood. They were amongst the children who sang "hosannas" to the Lord Jesus. They were deeply interested in all that they heard of Him, and especially in the fact that He had shewn himself so good and so gracious. They rejoiced that He, having little children before Him, had said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not ; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." And how joyously and hopefully could they then raise folded hands heavenwards, when aught awakened solicitude ; were it that they commended a sick father or mother, or any other sufferer in their family circle, to God ; or were it a petition to the throne of grace for some other desired blessing. But now they are grown up, they have become "enlightened," and have read newspapers and clever books, and loftily boast that they have climbed the heights of modern culture, and that with their childish habits



they likewise cast away their former faith, hope, trust, and prayer. Theirs is a lost paradise. But with a smile of fancied superiority, they now say that there was a time when they well-nigh might have relied upon that "beautiful legend of the gospel" as though it had been a real world. Between such objects of commiseration as these and the two travellers to Emmaus, there is nought akin ! We have still less hope of them than of those first described. Severe visitations of Providence only are calculated to bring about a change of mind in their case.

But now let me introduce to you a third class. To it belong those who also look back to a beautiful past which has disappeared, because they had become far more at home in the world of gospel belief, and had drunk far richer comforts and joys from its wells than the last-mentioned ones ; but to them that world has no less sunk in ruins under the assault of a new teaching hostile to the faith, and for them no longer exists any supernatural revelation, nor a Son of God veiled in the flesh, nor a Prince of Peace raised from the dead, because they fancy it has been irrefragably demonstrated by an "advanced science" that nothing of the kind can be believed without setting at defiance all the laws of thought which reason has determined. In their denial of the truth they certainly occupy the same stand-point as those represented above ; nevertheless, these essentially differ from the former, in that they do not look back upon their lost Eden with wanton thoughtlessness, but with sadness and silent grief, and would be indeed happy if they could believe the possibility that their once beautiful and much-loved dream might turn out to be a reality,—if they could, from its ruins, reconstruct the ideal kingdom which kindled the enthusiasm of their simple childhood. *These* doubters are, indeed, akin to those disciples going to Emmaus, who also had given up the gospel as lost, since their Master had died, and His corpse,



as they thought, had been carried away by His sworn foes. But, oh! with what yearnings did they recur to those days, now gone for ever, and how would they have rejoiced had they been able to find any sure ground of conviction that the Crucified One was nevertheless Lord of heaven, their Saviour, and Author of their bliss, and that as a proof He had not ceased to be so, He had really risen again from the dead. Hear them conversing by the way! Every word breathes the deepest longings for the restoration of their shattered paradise. But when such a frame of mind accompanies scepticism, however outspoken it may be, we consider ourselves fully authorised to entertain the most favourable opinion as to the issue.

II. There go our pilgrims. Lo! a third has joined them. We know who it is. But it must still remain concealed from them. After the stranger has induced them to reveal to Him the cause of their sorrow, He first arouses them from their gloomy dreaminess and stupor by rebuking them as "fools and slow of heart" because of their unbelief, and then He expounds to them all the Old Testament prophecies, from Moses downwards, which refer to the great Messiah, to His wonderful life on earth, and also to His passion, death, and resurrection. Then their hearts begin to burn within them, although they have no idea who it is that is speaking to them. The like is still experienced among unbelievers, provided they belong to the more serious and thoughtful doubters. Quiet hours of contemplation and reflection overtake us, when whole trains of thought pass through the soul; the man knows not himself whence they come, but they seem like the exhortations of an invisible friend who would turn us from unbelief to faith. The question then, perhaps, arises within us, "Is Christianity really the work and invention of man?"—Christianity, that spiritual power which has morally transformed the world, changed the face of the earth, opened the heaven



above it, and even in the present day does what no human science or art can ; for, as by enchantment, within a very short time, it not only rescues savage nations from their barbarism, but imparts gentleness and civilisation ; it transforms lions into lambs !—Christianity, which raises man above himself, presents to him the ideal of a higher destiny than ever before entered into any human heart ; it reveals to him a sanctity of which no philosopher of this world ever dreamed, and to which the noblest characters recorded in the history of the last eighteen hundred years owe their being and their inmost life. Can that possibly be of earthly origin and the offspring of the human brain ? And was *Christ himself* really but a man,—He who had indisputably declared Himself openly and publicly to be He who had come down from heaven ? Apart from the testimony of the Bible, are we not assured of it by the tradition of the Jews, down to the present time, that He was crucified by their fathers because He made Himself equal with God ? Is it conceivable that His contemporaries should have falsely attributed to a mere man the divine miracles, and *that* divine splendour of glory in which, for example, the fourth Gospel represents Him to us ? But that this Gospel was written by a contemporary and disciple of Jesus, by John, is now placed beyond all doubt. And assuming that which is inconceivable, namely, that the miracles of Jesus were only fictitious, who amongst those who saw Jesus bodily moving among them would ever have believed such fictions ? But it is an undeniable fact that, within a short time, thousands from their own observations really believed that the man of Nazareth was the only-begotten Son of the Father, and that they acknowledged Him, for time and for eternity, as the Saviour of their souls, accredited by God. And can it be denied that He unequivocally foretold that He, with His fishermen and publicans, should conquer the world, and that He would



build on the ruins of the old temple a new one, made of living stones,—a spiritual temple, which should be co-extensive with the whole world? And has not this prophecy been literally fulfilled? And His resurrection—is this really nothing but a fable? Where then was the corpse laid? Put out of the way by the Jews? Impossible! For how could these infuriated adversaries have foregone the opportunity of destroying at a blow the kingdom which they so much hated, by exhibiting at the right moment His bloody corpse? Did the apostles then carry Him away? Well, then, their enthusiasm would have been shewn for one now dead, who had, whilst living, most bitterly deceived them; they would then have joyfully staked everything, even blood and life, for a false Messiah; they would then fain have won over the highly-cultured nations of Greece and Rome to the banner of one who, manifestly, had been branded as a blasphemer by God himself. And Paul would then, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, which no one in the present day presumes to deny to be his, have borne testimony, which he boldly does, that any contemporary of the apostle, to whom the great fact might have appeared difficult of credit, might meet with numbers then living, both ocular and oral witnesses of it, for Christ had, subsequently to His resurrection, presented Himself to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom but few had then died. And as to His portraiture by the prophets—is there room for doubt when it is revealed in the person of Jesus to the minutest features? And how clearly is the divine plan of redemption revealed to us in the writings of the Old and New Testament. Did it not demand the death, and also, as a confirmation of the now completed work of redemption, the resurrection and glorification of Him who carried out the divine decree? These, and like considerations, are wont to press themselves on thoughtful persons who are in a state of unbelief. Unexpectedly, and as from



the clouds, they dart like lightning through the soul. Their "hearts burn within them." Their inner man is a battle-field. Their whole soul is in the greatest commotion. The entire edifice of their unbelief is suddenly shaken to its very foundation, and they feel themselves heaving with great presentiments and hopes. In them the experience of the disciples going to Emmaus is repeated. At such moments the Lord is speaking to them by His Spirit, though they are as yet unconscious that He is so near. Truly, they do not find themselves transported at once into the region of perfect faith, but, at least, the possibility is evident to them that they may yet find themselves entirely at home in the domain of faith.

III. From the extraordinary discourse of their unknown companion, whilst journeying to Emmaus, it appeared to our two disciples that an eventuality was suggested, the bare idea of which transported them. How intently and hopefully they listen to every word which falls from His lips! But see, they have reached their journey's end. Their friend makes as though He is going further. But how beseechingly do they beg and pray, "Abide with us: for it is towards evening, and the day is far spent." In these words the point of time is indicated in which the rising of the Easter Sun may be expected with certainty by every one. When evening gloom comes over our life, then morning will soon dawn, but never before. The evening shadows already draw on, when, with just light enough to discover the insignificance of our former life, we begin to feel the mental vacuity experienced in all that the world offers us: when the sigh which escaped the heart of Solomon bursts forth from ours—"Vanity of vanities! all is vanity!" and that which we once called pleasure now appears so insipid, and worldly honour only a child's toy. When we are troubled by the thought that we have wholly missed the aim of existence, because life has been consumed in the merest trifles, when



our way becomes more and more isolated, because the churchyard sod covers those we love best, the world appears stranger, colder, and more desolate, and the tree of hope sheds one withered leaf after another. Oh, then it is that our day seems "far spent!" And if, then, thoughts of eternity, awakening dread, gather around our soul, and we have to account to ourselves as to what we have to shew as lasting gain and profit from our former life; if we have to ask ourselves, in the event of death knocking at our door, either to-day or to-morrow, what grounds we have to anticipate a favourable sentence when arraigned before the Judge of the world, and what the real state of the case has been, and is now, about our "loving God with all our heart," and about our "being faithful in that which is least as in that which is greatest;" if our own conscience, as an inexorable accuser, finds us guilty of the most decided alienation from God, and it seem as though all openings through which a ray of comfort or hope could penetrate to us, were closed;—when overtaken by that bitterness of reflection which is inspired by the feeling that life with us has missed its aim, which state of mind is so far beyond relief by all worldly wisdom, that it but exposes its naked impotence by attempting it, and when utter despair in all that is called human consolation or human help extorts from the heart the cry of distress, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"—yes, then evening has overtaken us! And oh, what would then be to us such a Friend as the gospel exhibits! But now that our necessities are brought to our knowledge, to which such a Friend perfectly corresponds, behold a Friend who declares to sinners the forgiveness of sins; to doubters, the pledge of everlasting life, by pointing them to His own resurrection; to the gaze of weary travellers, the blessed rest of heaven in sure and certain prospect; and who discloses to the poor in spirit,



and those who are mentally famishing here, a beautiful world, replenished with the experience of heavenly joys, and who promises to the solitary and bereaved an everlasting reunion with the loved ones whom they mourn. Oh, now the eye of faith can see its way, and it will be easy for the heart to repeat in faltering accents the prayer of the disciples of Emmaus—“*It is now evening, and the day is far spent; deserted by all, O Thou who art my last refuge, abide with me.*” And however timorously the yearning spirit may utter it at first, it will not be long before the scene at Emmaus will be repeated. The Lord breaks to us the bread of His comfort, of His peace; and this heavenly food once tasted, we shall immediately be illumined with the Easter Sun, and joyfully exclaim, “Jesus lives, and with him I likewise.” By God’s grace, may this happen to us all, and may the risen Prince of Peace say His “Yea and Amen,” whilst we pray with the poet—

“ Then break through our hard hearts Thy way,  
O Jesus! conquering King!  
Kindle the lamp of faith to-day,  
Teach our faint hearts to sing,  
For joy at length,  
That in Thy strength  
We, too, may rise, whom sin had slain,  
**And** Thy eternal rest attain.”

*Lyra Germanica.*



## VIII.

THE PRINCE OF PEACE IN THE EVENING  
ASSEMBLY.

WE hear the royal singer, in Psalm lv. 7, utter the sigh, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest." Do not these words sound wonderfully stirring? Do they not awake in us feelings like those that moved the heart of the Psalmist? There is an innate longing in man to escape beyond the narrow limits of this imperfect world into higher regions. Anxiety about vulgar and common objects may to all appearance stifle the emotion, but even where man is not sunk so low, it not unfrequently lies for a length of time dormant within him. But it is remarkable that this tendency of the soul is wont to revive just when the most beautiful, pleasing, and exalted objects in nature are presented to us. It is when we walk in the awful stillness peculiar to the heights of mountain ranges, or stand lost in admiration of the majestic spectacle of sunrise or sunset, or indulge ourselves in the glorious season of spring, surrounded by the divine creative breath as we walk about its blooming scenes, or, again, allow our ravished eye to wander through the far-sparkling host of stars: it is on such occasions that, ere we are aware, we breathe forth in tender and gentle accents proceeding from the inmost soul, "Oh that I had wings like a dove!" It seems to me as though, in all the beauty which surrounds



us, we saw but the reflection of the dawn of something incomparably more glorious; but from which we are separated by an immeasurable gulf. Yes; and with this dim remembrance of a lost paradise is mingled the thought, that though we were long ago deprived of it, nevertheless it is not lost to us for ever. We have a dim presentiment of the existence of an ideal world, and feel it to be that for which we were created and born. In the longing language of, "Oh that I had wings!" the soul breathes forth its aspirations after it, and would fain burst through all barriers in order to soar up to it, to take its place amongst the angelic host; and with them, in the light of God's countenance, to discover the solution of all problems and the unsealing of all mysteries. The perfect satisfaction of this deep-seated and mighty longing, at some future time, is faithfully promised to the friends of God. They will be furnished with "the wings of a dove;" yes, heaven will come down to earth, and they will blend together into one world. If ever a delicate, fragrant prototype of that future, worthy certainly of the warmest desires, has appeared on earth, it was during those forty days when the Prince of Peace, raised again from death to a new life, communed with His disciples, clad in His glorified body. We will now revert in spirit to that delightful period which has, and not without reason, been said to represent a foreshadowing of that perfect kingdom of God upon earth which is revealed in prophecy. Who would not like to linger on the spot where the "Oh that I had wings!" should be silenced for a season? because we should feel as though the passionate impulse which prompted its utterance had received already its full satisfaction.

MARK xvi. 14; LUKE xxiv. 36-48; JOHN xx. 19, 20.

"Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus unto the eleven, as they sat at meat, and saith unto



them, Peace be unto you ! But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen : and he said unto them, Why are ye so troubled ? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts ? Behold my hands and my feet that it is I myself : handle me, and see ; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye any meat ? And they gave him a piece of broiled fish and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These are the words that I spake unto you, while I was yet with you : that all things must be fulfilled which were written in Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures. And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations. And ye are witnesses of these things."

The scene now brought under our consideration is of the highest importance. It crowns all the manifestations which our Lord made of Himself upon the day of the resurrection ; the first real celebration of Easter by the company of the redeemed disciples, the concentration into one focus of all the single rays which the miracle of the third day had up to that time thrown upon the night of the world, and under its powerful working, the faith of the little flock in the resurrection advanced much nearer to its "full maturity." Let us contemplatively approach the scene so full of meaning, and observe, in the first place, *the Easter greeting of the risen Saviour* ; then *the manner of His appearing* ; and, lastly, *His Easter testimony*. May the Spirit of the Lord illumine us with His light, and likewise crown our words with a lasting blessing !

I. Let us return to that late evening assembly whither we conducted the disciples from Emmaus. There we find the disciples and the women still engaged in earnest conversation



with each other. But the lateness of the hour suggests no thought of departure or of separation. Easter-day is already dawning brightly above them ; yet many of them, unaffected by the full sunshine of evidence, still grope in the mists of doubt and faintheartedness. Joy in the ascendant certainly ruled the spirits of the cordially attached company ; but it still was in some measure restricted and depressed with many a fear and anxiety. The brethren who brought such glad tidings might still possibly have been deceived and mistaken. And even if they were not so, it was quite conceivable that the risen Saviour might not again appear to them, that they would be left in ignorance as to His person and their own future. Moreover, who could assure them that the Jews, fearing lest the disciples should make the people believe that their Master had really left the grave alive, would not fall stealthily upon them ; and taking their lives, would not endeavour to root out of the earth the scarce germinating seed of the infant Church of Christ ? The closely-barred doors of the room in which we find them assembled prove that the thought of this eventuality had made them anxious.

What a dismal and horrible thing is fear ! It hangs like a leaden weight on our energies ; and like a concealed but destructive worm, it gnaws away all we cherish as happiness, joy, and peace. It covers our sky with blackness, and renders the air which surrounds us so dense that breathing becomes difficult. It nails us to a cross of deep inward discomfort, and in the diffident and retiring man it quenches his love, together with his cheerfulness and serenity. And is not this destroyer the hereditary portion of us all ? It lurks from our very birth in the heart of every human being. It may doze ; but the rustling of a leaf suffices to rouse it. It reposes in the breast of every one like a lightly-sleeping lion, and the boldest hero will not maintain that he knows nothing of this monster. Think only of the amount of dark superstition



still found in the civilised world ; of the horror of apparitions, from which few are entirely free ; of the choice of lucky days on which anything is to be undertaken ; of the idolatry practised with amulets, talismans, charms, and magic formulas ; as well as of the importance attached to a hundred sorts of so called " signs or prognostications," but which are indeed in themselves destitute of all significance. Whence comes all these ? Fear, the lamentable and universal dowry of our fallen nature, is the parent of all these things. How truly does Job speak when he says, " Is there not an appointed warfare to man upon earth ? And are not his days also like the days of an hireling ? " and Paul, also, when he exclaims, " Without were fightings, within were fears." Observe mankind. Is not their prevalent tone of mind that of one who everywhere discovers powers conspiring against him, from which he must protect himself, against which he must arm himself ? At one time he sees himself threatened with the loss of property, at another he fears injury to his health ; at one time he dreads the loss of influential patronage, at another he is afraid of the dissolution of the dearest ties of love and friendship. And if these things, or such as these, do not rob him of his rest, yet he is terrified by the incessant flight of time, by the perception of the transient nature of all earthly things, the feeling that old age is hastening on like a hurricane, and close behind is the dusky figure of the king of terrors, the inevitable angel of death lying in wait for him ; his conscience, moreover, murmurs more than he likes to hear about a judgment to come, and however earnestly he may strive to silence it, he never succeeds in the attempt. This hateful inmate is intractable, and scorns every attempt to bribe or stupify him. Thus the poor offspring of Adam is always and everywhere trying to escape, and nobody will wonder that he dislikes to be alone, and seeks to forget himself and to avoid self-reflection in a whirl of dis-



sipation. And should this device succeed for a while, fear, that gloomy demon, always makes a path for itself, and its power increases in proportion as man is thoroughly relieved from falsehood, and as he advances in the line of truth. I do not need to remind you in what degree, or to what extent fear rules the minds of men in our days. How frequently do we hear it said, and that in the gravest manner, "What will become of society, for the world is at its wits' end?" With what are we menaced by these dark clouds, or by those which beset our horizon? In our day there are assuredly not a few among us who will feel themselves to be more nearly related to the disciples assembled within the barred doors, than they ever previously did, in this one respect at least, and will more truly than ever envy them the greeting which suddenly resounded throughout the evening gathering, and in one moment transformed all their anxieties and cares into the purest delight.

What greeting! listen to it! Whilst the disciples, in the greatest perturbation, are still discussing the events of the day, over and over again expressing their doubts, and then checking them, communicating to each other their apprehensions, and again suggesting their hopes, suddenly through their midst is heard, in heart-stirring accents well known to them, a distinct, "*Peace be unto you!*" The din of conversation is hushed into solemn stillness. The disciples, taken by surprise, look round, and, lo! who stands before them? Dare they trust their eyes? Yes, it is He! Who shall depict their joyous amazement? He himself, the Master who was dead, and is alive again, stands in their midst. "*Peace*" is the first word with which He hails them; "*peace,*" sweet, blessed sound! What is "*peace?*" It is a calm in the inmost soul,—not the calm of one asleep or dreaming, but when wide awake; it is cheerful self-composure, not only in the bare possibility of danger menaced,



but realised in its very presence; it is the deep harmony of the soul, not only in sunshine, but when the tempest rages above us and all around. But does this peace dwell in the valley of tribulation and of tears? Praised be God that though for a season it was banished, nevertheless it has returned to us again. It breathes upon you from more than *one* manifestation in the history of Divine providence exercised here on earth. Its voice is heard from more than one mortal mouth speaking gently and soothingly to you. Truly no human wisdom can assist you to this peace. By no personal efforts can you attain it—no earthly incantation can obtain it for you. But there is One who alone can both wish it may be yours, and likewise confer it. Behold, it is He who has just appeared here who, with a word, has dispelled all fear and solved all doubts! Do you know Him? Oh, believe it! He is *the Prince of Peace*. Do you ask how He became so? Observe Him and His whole demeanour; He entered that chamber, not only to proclaim peace to His disciples, but to present a sensible manifestation of it.

II. The disciples see Him standing before them. "*But,*" says the narrative, with reference to the majority at least of them, "*they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.*" For a moment they held Him to be an apparition from another world, who, in order to manifest Himself, had temporarily assumed the human form. It seems also to be beyond all question that the Lord had entered the chamber without any one of the bolted doors having been previously opened. Some able commentators have certainly been of opinion that the evangelist John only added the observation "*when the doors were shut,*" to corroborate his assertion that the disciples were assembled in great fear. They think that the door was opened by one of the disciples from Emmaus, who heard Him knock, and first recognised His voice. But the tenor of the Gospel nar-



rative clearly indicates a miracle ; and as such the entrance of Christ into this evening assembly corresponds exactly with the peculiar manner in which He usually did appear after His resurrection. Truly, a bodily form subject entirely to the will and beck of the mind, and freed from the limitations of space and time, is wholly beyond our human comprehension. But how many other things are there, the denial of whose existence on *this* account merely would be the grossest folly ?

Our Lord, immediately upon His manifestation, expresses Himself in terms of *serious reproach*, exactly as He had done with the disciples of Emmaus. He reproves the unbelief and hardness of heart of His disciples in not having believed those who had seen Him since His resurrection, and says to them, "*Why are ye troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?*" This reprehensory "why" they had deserved. After all that they had heard and experienced throughout that day, their spirit of incredulity was perfectly unjustifiable. But a rebuke administered with the decision and energy of the most profound and most vivid conviction is even now, generally speaking, more calculated to reclaim sceptics from their unbelief in evangelical truth, than the adoption of an indulgent sympathy with the tissue of scruples and doubts frequently woven merely to promote self-gratification. The spark of belief from the inmost soul of the speaker, flashing with electric velocity through the hearer, will far more probably effect conviction and conversion than the most ingenious arguments and subtle apologies. Did not the apostles, during their missionary labours, exert the most convincing influence by the involuntary exhibition of their extreme surprise and righteous anger at the blindness of those who heard their testimony, and still persisted in their unbelief ? Every one felt that those heralds of Christ were thoroughly convinced of the truth of what they pub-



lished ; and this very feeling caused the strongest defences to totter and give way, which had until then resisted the gospel of which they were the witnesses.

The decided expression, "*Why come such thoughts into your hearts?*" did not, we may rest assured, fail of immediate effect upon the assembled disciples, and at least, it quickly dispelled the idea of a mere ghostly apparition. With His wonted kindness, our Lord still shews Himself condescendingly towards them who now found themselves suddenly transported into a world to which they were not accustomed ; for, to calm their amazement He condescended even to stretch out His hands that they might touch them, and, pointing to the marks in His feet and His side, to say, "*It is I myself: handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have.*" Evidently our Lord admits here, though indirectly, the possibility of the visible return of departed persons from the other world into this ; for otherwise would He not rather have said, "Ghostly apparitions belong to the realms of phantasy?" He would then have branded as deceptions the appearance of the departed Samuel before Saul, as also those of the prophets Moses and Elijah on Mount Tabor. It was our Lord's immediate purpose to convince the disciples that He had not for the moment assumed a mere unsubstantial form, but that He really stood before them in the very same body in which He had been consigned to the grave. His resurrection was to serve to His disciples as a type, a pledge of their own future resurrection ; and so it came naturally to be a matter of the utmost importance that the reality of it should be placed beyond all doubt. This subject again presses upon us all the questions concerning the nature and constitution of a glorified body, and here more especially where we see the risen Saviour taking bread—inquiries which will probably never be satisfactorily solved in this present world. Has such



a body *really* "*flesh and bones?*" or does the Lord simply condescend to our powers of conception when He thus expresses Himself? Has the glorified body really "*flesh and bones*" in such fashion that it can not only be seen, but also handled by organs not yet glorified? Can such a body receive earthly food in the same manner as our own? And if so, must not the food undergo a perfectly different process from that which we know to be the usual one? Or was the glorification of His body but incipient and progressive at the moment when Christ presented Himself to the evening assembly? and is it to be conceived of by us as only perfectly complete on the day of His ascension? We are here confronted by mysteries which no mortal eye can ever penetrate. But let us not be uneasy on this account. By how many phenomena in creation does the most learned philosopher unhesitatingly confess himself mastered, saying, "This and that are indisputable facts, but it is utterly impossible to explain or account for them!" Why, then, should not the invisible spheres, which belong to those who, after death, are born again to everlasting life, conceal within themselves equal, if not far greater, mysteries and problems? Let us but have patience! The time will come when we shall see all veils removed, all contradictions solved, and with prayerful admiration shall we behold the mysteries of God revealed to us in all their depths.

When the disciples at Jerusalem see the cicatrised wounds in our Lord's hands, feet, and side, they then necessarily believe that the same Master stands before them who but lately lived in their midst. But their faith is, nevertheless, again about to waver, and now, indeed, as the narrative informs us, "for very joy." If we but reflect a while, it will not be difficult for us to realise their frame of mind. If Christ really were alive again, as the conqueror of death, then what grand and inexpressibly blessed consequences



necessarily followed from this fact. Then they who up to that time had been so distressed saw a paradise of peace and hope suddenly opened to them, in which they might for ever forget that which had been once lost through Adam. The joy experienced under such circumstances was almost too much for them. The thought in which they were absorbed was, "such abundant grace to us poor sinners! Impossible!" It was, indeed, the unjustifiable surrender of their privileges which tended to prevent the disciples from believing. But the riches of divine compassion should not, however, have been dimmed to their apprehension by the feeling, only too justly entertained, of their own personal unworthiness. If the great God once substituted grace for justice, it is to be expected that He will do so superabundantly. Were the measure of His benefits limited by that of our desert, what might we anticipate? Nothing at all. But we may expect everything, even the highest, since He has determined that free grace shall prevail.

Our Lord commiserates those who are still faint-hearted and despondent. "*Have ye here any meat?*" says He. At His request a piece of broiled fish and an honeycomb is set before Him. And He takes and eats it before them; and now, indeed, there is no longer any doubt of the reappearance of the Master. John says, "*Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.*" Yes; not until now had their Easter feast been rung in with a full peal. They feel as if they had risen again from the dead themselves. An inexpressibly blissful peace penetrates their hearts; and they all could then unitedly exclaim, with still more fervent ardour than Peter on Mount Tabor, "*It is good for us to be here; let us erect tabernacles.*" How far they then surmised the intimate and mysterious connexion of the peaceful greeting of their Master with the marks of His wounds which He exhibited to them, it is difficult to say. Perhaps, in the



latter, they recognised at the time no more than the proofs of His triumph over the last enemy, the king of terrors. Subsequently, they learned to think more highly of these scars of their Redeemer, and to recognise in them both the pledges and the seals of the perfected atonement, and, consequently, the special sources and fountains from which flowed all their peace.

III. Observe, lastly, *the testimony* which our Lord bears to His resurrection before this evening assembly. It is concise, but couched in highly significant terms. "*These are the words,*" He begins, "*which I spake unto you while I was yet with you.*" He hereby intimates that His earthly ministry is henceforth complete, and His mission as the "Servant of God" is finally fulfilled and discharged. "*For,*" He continues, "*all things must be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me.*" Observe how, under these three heads, the second of which comprehends the historical books, and the last the writings of Solomon and Job, *the whole of the Old Testament canon*, in the form in which we now have it, is comprised, and how He has affixed to it the seal of *indisputable Divine revelation*. How can any one be still disposed to deny that this Holy Volume really contains prophecies, unless they desire to accuse the Lord of glory, not only of fanaticism, but also of lying, nay, of the grossest deception. Alas! that in our days even believing theologians should occasionally be found who are so imposed upon by the ruling spirit of defection, that they are not ashamed to reduce the Divine prophecies in Scripture to mere human prognostications, thus reducing the real and living God to a level with a dumb idol. What further witness do we need that those dreadful days are at hand of which the Saviour said, that if it were possible, "*even the elect*" should be led astray? To us, as it appears to me, Jesus Christ remains



the authority which ranks high as heaven above every other claiming to be such here on earth. The canon, which is accredited with His seal on the face of it, stands superior to all the defects alleged by short-sighted human criticism, and by a vainly boasted science of carnal wisdom. It is, indeed, natural to man to err, but whoever follows Him who could say, "*I am the truth,*" will never, never go astray.

Our Lord "*then opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures.*" He not only opens up the Scripture to them, but He, moreover, opens their heart to the Scripture, making the way to it easy. And what is it that He presents to them from the rich treasury of the Divine word? What forms the substance of His last words to His disciples? According to the view which many entertain of His mission, it would have consisted of rules of virtue and directions for a holy life. But after His resurrection we nowhere hear Him saying to His disciples, "Observe that which I have commanded you, and follow in my footsteps;" but as in this passage, so likewise in every other, do we find Him pressing home evidence from the prophetic writings, insisting, as He did upon nothing else, that it was God's plan and determination that He should suffer and die; and it is well known that all the selected passages from the Old Testament which treat of the *passion* of the future Messiah, do so as a *mediatorial, vicarious, and propitiatory work*. During those forty days He never preached morals and law. Certainly, as often as He appears before His disciples, He indicates by the emphatic annunciation to them of His greeting of "Peace," that they should ever henceforth walk before God with free and unburdened consciences, seeing that the reconciliation was now accomplished. Nowhere does He commission His apostles to go out into the world to present to all the picture of virtue which His life portrayed, thereby to stir up their hearers to a moral enthu-



siasm which should make them worthy of heaven. But we hear Him say "*that repentance and remission of sins*" should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. He nowhere makes the vow of "moral and religious self-improvement" the first condition of entrance into the kingdom of heaven; but appoints the sacrament of baptism as the initiatory act of admission into this kingdom, by which the *forgiveness of sins* is promised to all those who penitently receive it, not by way of reward for good works previously done, but presented gratuitously, as an earnest and a necessary preliminary of all good works. Thus our risen Saviour ever places His offices as Mediator, Propitiator, and Prince of Peace in the foreground, in order that we may rest assured that our relations, as those that are saved with Him the Saviour, do not originate in our choosing of Him as a pattern, but in our apprehension and acceptance of Him as our Saviour and Redeemer. *First, reconciled* by Him, and then transformed into His gracious image! He is first our *High Priest*, our *Mediator*, and then our *Pattern*, our *Guiding-star*. This is the order of salvation, the inversion of which is diametrically to oppose God's plan of salvation. The experience of the grace of God in Christ Jesus within us, first renders sanctification possible: for a perception of the love of God to us kindles reciprocated love to God, and this is "*the fulfilling of the law.*" The apostles were to witness to *this* truth, and they did so. What is their whole gospel, but a testimony of the work of redemption finished by Christ, and of the justification of the sinner by grace through faith alone, without any act of merit on his part?

Would that we likewise heartily rejoiced in this gospel! The peaceful greeting of the Easter Prince still to this day resounds throughout the world, but it is a sound heeded but by few, unheard by the majority, though the world was



never more destitute of peace than at this very time. Falsehood closes both its ear and heart. In direct opposition to conscience and better knowledge, men would suppress the acknowledgment of the fact that sin in all its forms is an accursed and detested abomination in God's sight; that the Lord God is the holy and righteous Judge; and *that* the apostle spoke the truth when he declared, "It is appointed unto men once to die, *and after death the judgment.*" The world does not now need that its acuteness should be less keen, as many in their ignorance believe, but that its judgment should be enlightened and quickened to a perception of the fact, that in Christ is salvation. The advice best suited to the present generation is that given to the Church at Laodicea — "*Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see;*" and the petition that may be recommended to them as the best is that of David, "*Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name.*" All ye who still struggle against unbelief, use this prayer; and may the Lord in His mercy enable you shortly, ay, very shortly, to unite in singing Luther's jubilant and triumphant resurrection song with the fullest assurance of faith:—

" Now our Paschal lamb is He,  
And by Him alone we live,  
Who to death upon the tree  
For our sakes Himself did give.  
Faith His blood strikes on our door,  
Death dares never harm us more !

Hallelujah ! "

*Lyra Germanica.*



## IX.

THOMAS.

“THE Lord weigheth the spirits,” (Proverbs xvi. 2.) If, on the one hand, this passage of Solomon excite alarm, there is, on the other, a consolatory and encouraging aspect in which it may be viewed. Therefore, boast not of success in thy courtship of the world, for the world’s applause is anything rather than a trustworthy admeasurement of thy true worth. It may come to pass that the world shall heap its honours upon thee, whilst the sentence given above with reference to thee, shall be, “*weighed and found wanting!*” But, conversely, it may also happen, that whilst the world passes the harshest judgments on thee, the order is sent down from heaven in thy favour, “*Touch not the apple of mine eye!*” The judicial eye of Omniscience, incorruptible in its nature, looks through a man’s exterior and sounds the depths of his heart, and pierces searchingly the inmost recesses of his soul, and it may come to pass, in defiance of a censorious world, that a man as deeply prostrate as David shall be indicated and commended as “a man after God’s own heart;” or one like Peter, outrageously denying his Lord, shall become the object of the most tender Divine love, whilst another, who goes about with the nimbus of a saint shall be branded and cast off by God as a “*whited sepulchre.*” And as it may be the case that one who fre-



quently has backslidden may stand higher in the sight of God than many another who appears to have walked in the way of the commandments blamelessly, so it is not to be confidently affirmed that he who makes a good confession shall always rank in the judgment of God before the doubter, nor even the believer, before him who is still wrestling with the unbelief of his heart.

In that passage of the Gospel which is about to engage our attention we have an instance of a strong utterance of unbelief ; but, at the same time, we find therein an excellent opportunity to appreciate the comfort flowing from the fact that "God weigheth the spirits," and that God's scales differ from those of the short-sighted children of men who usually judge only according to appearances.

JOHN XX. 24-29.

"But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them : then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you ! Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands ; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side : and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed : blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

What rich abundance of matter for spiritual contemplation is displayed in this passage of the Gospel ! Where shall we begin to consider its treasures of thought, and where shall we end ? It would be advisable to limit ourselves to the consideration of that part of it which particularly corresponds with our necessities, and which will, therefore, have a direct practical importance for us. Let us consider, then, first, how the story of Thomas *confirms*



*anew the truth of the resurrection of Christ; then, what a comforting prospect it reveals to the conscientious doubters amongst us; afterwards, what a new and brilliant light it sheds on the superhuman dignity of the person of Christ; and, lastly, how it enlightens us as to the nature and essence of saving faith!* It has often happened that this story of the experience of Thomas has, whilst under consideration, insensibly been reproduced upon those engaged in its meditation. May God in mercy grant that this may now be the case!

I. Many may have been rendered uneasy by the surmise, that the first witnesses through whose testimony the resurrection of Christ has been made known to us might have believed too hastily, might have been led astray by their earnest desire that their Master *should* live again, and might thus have been led to mistake a mere dream of their fancy for a real manifestation. The story we are now engaged upon cuts away the foundation for the existence of such a thought. We here see a man who certainly could not be taxed with being guilty of credulity. Thomas was no dreamer, but a man in whom scrutinising thought predominated over imagination, in whom reflection outweighed feeling, and withal of a hot, passionate temperament, somewhat inclined to melancholy. He must needs comprehend that which he was to receive as truth; and ere belief could reach his heart, it had to break through a whole redoubt of arguments and scruples. Thomas was inclined to look at everything rather from the dark than the bright side. Recall for a moment the scene in John xi. 8, and following verses, where our Lord decidedly opposed the anxious dissuasions of His disciples, with reference to His return to Judea, the land of His enemies. Who was it that broke forth in those words characterised by melancholy resignation, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him?" It was Thomas, who, in the



event of his Master's going, saw nothing but utter destruction in prospect, together with the annihilation of their hopes. And who was it subsequently, (John xiv. 4,) when the Lord said unto His disciples, "Whither I go, ye know, and the way ye know," that said most disconsolately, and not without a touch of ill-humour and of melancholy forwardness, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?" The same disciple again. Did it not seem as though he wished to reflect upon his Lord for acting thus mysteriously with His disciples? and were not his words to this effect—"We cannot understand what you really mean, and it is almost impossible for us to remain firm to your cause?"

Thomas was at Jerusalem on the day of the resurrection, and with the disciples when they received the report of the women as to our Lord's vacated tomb and the vision of angels, which they insisted upon having seen. But from all that was reported to him, he only considered himself justified in inferring a knavish trick on the part of the enemy, and in ascribing the pretended vision of angels solely to the lively imagination of the excited and credulous women. Overwhelmed by hopeless sorrow, he had soon, much too soon, withdrawn himself from the circle of his fellow-apostles, and, with grief bordering on despair, had gone into retirement. By so doing, however, he had deprived himself of the intense joy of being present at that evening assembly, in the midst of which, when the doors were shut, our Lord presented Himself,—when, by His exclamation, "Peace be with you!" He had, in the most condescending and gracious manner, liberated the disciples from all suspense and doubt. This is what Thomas lost by his overhasty separation; and every other wilful separation from the "holy catholic Church of Christ," and from "the communion of saints," will avenge itself similarly. He who determines



on such a step renounces blessings for which he will never find compensation. He no longer perceives the "*manifold wisdom of God in the Church.*" He does not rejoice when one member of it in this or the other place is signally honoured. He has no share in the blessed efforts put forth by the great brotherhood in the field of missions, in Bible societies, and other works of faith and love; he no longer commemorates with the Church its victories and triumphs. Innumerable sources of encouragement, adapted to strengthen his faith and excite holy joy, are closed to him. His soul is exposed to a gradually-withering process, like that of a limb to which a ligature has been applied. He becomes one-sided, contracted, narrow-minded, and destitute of love. Sequestered from the great body of the Church of Jesus, there can be no happiness, no prosperity. The members of Christ's Church are by its constitution *brethren*, a closely-united *household*, nay, a *living organisation*, wherein one member is attached to another, each helping the other, according to the gift which has been imparted to him, in order that "the body may grow up into *Him* who is its Head, making increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

On that hallowed evening, then, Thomas was no longer in the circle of the brethren. The day following, or perhaps, even the same night, his brethren sought him in his retirement, and, with beaming countenances, made known to him what great and glorious things they had experienced. Now, indeed, he will have believed, and have opened his heart to joy! One would have thought so. But no; look at him! Instead of exulting in the resurrection, there is something in his manner which seems to say, "Are you indeed dreaming? I am not to be entertained with a child's tale!" But did Thomas really and seriously think their report to be such. Far be it from me to say he did. He rather seemed



to desire purposely to combat his glimmering faith, for fear of a repeated, and hence more bitter, disappointment; and when I hear him give expression to the daring words, "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe," I cannot forbear the suspicion that a secret vexation at the preference which his fellow-disciples had experienced, a sort of envious feeling towards them, rather than unbelief, may have caused this obstinate outbreak. We are, however, pleased to meet this disciple in the Easter narrative. He met the report of the resurrection with all those doubts which make belief so difficult to very many in the present day. Now if this sceptic be at length convinced and constrained to believe, will not his conversion necessarily be considered as a leading evidence of the historical truth of the Easter miracle? Most certainly. But how is it possible that he ever should be convinced? It will be difficult; but the harder it is, the greater weight will his conviction throw into our scale.

II. Let no one be mistaken in the character of our Thomas. He was not a doubter of the common and ordinary stamp, from want of love to truth, or from a vain longing to acquire the reputation of being "a man of superior intelligence," or from a secret aversion to Christ and His cause. No one in the world would have been happier than he had he been able to discover a valid reason for opening his heart to the faith of his fellow-disciples. However bold and defiant the expression, "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails," &c., may sound, it burst forth, bathed in tears, from the depths of his inmost soul. The matter in question seemed to him of such great and glorious consequences that he would not yield himself to the belief of it, until he felt perfectly sure that he should not be hurled down from a heaven of happiness into an abyss of most dreadful disappointment.



He was a doubter, and we have still many such, but he was not one of that very numerous tribe who are insincere, malevolent, and wilful sceptics, or tainted with most contemptible indifference to the whole matter. The honest doubter is one who really seeks after truth, and fully acknowledges that the position of those who yield unconditional faith to the gospel of Christ is most enviable, and sympathising with the man at Jerusalem who exclaimed wishfully, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" he frequently says the same. But *reason*, with its aversion to all which lies beyond the limits of natural ideas and conceptions; worldly wisdom, with its fallacious arguments and bold dictatorial utterances, usurping rule over a province which is entirely beyond its scope and above the judgment of a worldly man; the authority of so-called *public opinion*, which in these degenerate days is (in Germany) so thoroughly impregnated with antichrist and unbelief; the illusion of a sophistical and juggling criticism, which labours to cast suspicion upon the Holy Scriptures; the imposing example of men distinguished by their knowledge, culture, and mental endowments, who stand out conspicuously in their denial of divine revelation; and, lastly, the fear, partly of the disgrace of appearing as though left behind in the progress of modern culture, and partly lest they should be found trusting in a kingdom that might prove to be but a castle in the air, and which would then expose the soul to all the bitterness of an awakening from an agreeable self-illusion; all this is well calculated to subvert the faith of many, nay, more, to deter them from accepting the most self-evident truths. Hence they stand aloof, and, as from a distance, regard the kingdom of Christian comforts, hopes, and expectations, as a paradise to which they are attracted, but from which they are separated by a wide gulf. Oh that a bridge were but thrown over by which they might safely reach the beautiful world



on the other side ! They would indeed be thankful for it ! But this bridge cannot be built of human materials, though they should be the very noblest. Nevertheless there is a "master-builder" who, in His own good time, knows well how to help such doubters as we have described to get across.

A week has elapsed since the day of the resurrection. We are again mentally transported to Jerusalem, and indeed into the same circle of disciples, whom our risen Lord had surprised by that evening visit which brought all their grief to an end. And, behold, Thomas has again renewed his relations with the brethren ! nay, he could no longer exist withdrawn from their fellowship. Solitude had become more intolerable to him than the closest incarceration ; and the atmosphere of the world, alienated from God and inimical to Christ, in which he moved, had threatened entirely to stifle all his affections. He who has ever lived in the fellowship of saints, who has ever drunk of the streams of love and comfort which flow there, knows there are *two* worlds,—an old one, and a new one created by Christ. And he will never again feel at home in the old one. He must live "*among his own people*," or he feels sad and desolate. Ask our Thomas whether it be not so with him, and he will declare that it is, in the strongest terms. We find the disciples in the same house, and in the same room, where, a week before, the revelation of the risen Saviour had been vouchsafed them. As they did then, so they do now,—they keep the doors shut,—and, precisely as might have been anticipated, they have but one topic of conversation—the Risen One, and the resurrection of Him who "was dead, and behold He liveth, and beareth the keys of hell and of death." Thomas listens with the greatest interest, but in perfect silence, to the eager conversation of his brethren. He had found leisure in the week's interval to pass his doubts in review once more, and there is no question but that he had bewildered himself



in examining the foundation of some of them. Hence belief was to him as yet impossible. What would he not give to be enabled to believe! Suddenly, throughout the assembly, the greeting, so well known to most of them, "Peace be with you!" resounds again; and when they, joyously surprised, look up, there *He* stands again, bodily before them. *He*, the highly-exalted One, the desired One, again sheds, from His countenance upon those favoured ones, rays of complacency and love. And to whom does He draw near after that He had so graciously greeted the assembly? To whom does He address Himself so kindly, so affably? May we believe our eyes? The unbelieving, perverse disciple is this time the object of His prevenient and most condescending marks of attention. Petrified with astonishment, reverence, and shame, Thomas sees Him approach! The erring disciple, who had in so daring a manner expressed his unbelief, may well cast down his eyes, trembling and blushing. Nevertheless he has nothing to fear! The dreadful day is not yet come when thousands, like him, will stand before the Lord, trembling with far greater reason than he, because in Him, of whom they once rebelliously said, "*We will not have this man to reign over us,*" they now, to their utter consternation, and for the first time, recognise the King of kings, the Lord of lords, and the Judge both of the living and the dead. To unbelieving Thomas our Lord still came as the *Prince of Peace*. Thomas, whose heart was still attached to Him, had remained, even whilst astray, His beloved disciple. Were he sick, then certainly it was his Master's office to be his physician. Though Thomas did not believe, the heavenly spark of love still faintly glimmered within him, and therefore the oil of his faith could not be entirely exhausted. Our Saviour addresses him, and literally repeats Thomas's own words, "*Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be*



*not faithless, but believing.*" What must have been the disciple's experience at this moment? He might fain have hid his face—nay, have crept into the very bosom of the earth. But how was this salutary shame alleviated and sweetened by his Lord's infinite kindness and compassion! Thomas has not touched the wounds of his Lord,—those signs of His victory over death, the grave, and hell,—but he has read in them his everlasting redemption, and from this hour he no longer doubts that his Master is really alive. And it was also *his Lord's desire* that His apostle should be thoroughly convinced of the historical truth of the great fact, to which he was to testify—it being the basis of all Christianity. And this His aim was now most fully attained.

Let us adore the condescending love with which the Easter Prince met His unbelieving disciple, and let us realise in it comfort in reference to those among us, who, driven about by many a storm of doubt, cannot yet reach the port of the kingdom of God. If they desire in good earnest to reach that haven, and if with their doubts there be associated a secret feeling of the enviable blissful state of those who already have attained to faith, and if withal there be united a well sustained wrestling for truth, and fervent prayer for illumination, they may rest assured that they are not only taken into the affections of the "Good Shepherd," but likewise into His charge and guidance. For these also the time is at hand when their experience will be coincident with that of their brother Thomas; the Lord will, in some mode or other, come to their help, or, by some unmistakable manifestation of His wondrous and peace-inspiring nearness, will remove the veil from before their eyes. It is precisely on the ground of such happy experiences with which He surprises them, and which put an end to all uncertainty, that He gives the solemn injunction, "Be not faithless, but believing."



III. Overcome with awe, amazement, and veneration, Thomas stands for some moments motionless before his Lord. But then, raised far above himself in a moment of supernatural enlightenment, with his knees bending to the dust, his heart pours forth a confession, higher, richer, and more comprehensive than any that had ever, till then, been uttered by mortal lips. All the rays of celestial grandeur which Thomas had ever seen stream from the person of his Master, as well as all the intimations of His superhuman dignity which, challenging admiration, had ever forced themselves upon him whilst listening to His sayings, or witnessing His wondrous acts, now met and combined as in a focus. "My Lord and my God!" he exclaims—an utterance of the clearest, deepest, and liveliest convictions. Indeed, it would be erroneous to suppose that Thomas's conceptions of the divinity of Christ were already so clear and ample that he could at once have moulded them into an accurate dogmatical form. His utterance was the expression of a deep, living perception and feeling, which, although he was hardly conscious of it himself, involved nothing less than the dogma of the real unity of the only-begotten Son with His Divine Father. The words of Thomas, moreover, do not admit of doubt; they leave no room for misconstruction. They testify clearly and decidedly to the divinity of Christ, and form one of the mighty rocks on which those who will not believe Christ to have been more than man, and who even pretend that the Bible is on their side in this matter, must see their opinion totally wrecked. Let the adversaries of our faith call in to their aid all the acuteness and wit which they possess, and exhaust all their arsenals of learning and criticism, the expression, "My God," stands there now as it has done from the beginning, and certainly allows of no other explanation than that which the letter demands. Many, in despair, have become almost desperate about this, and have not been ashamed



to endeavour to extricate themselves from their difficulties by the absurd pretence that Thomas did not call Jesus his Lord and his God, but that, adopting the very bad practice of modern days, he, in this expression, only gave vent to his surprise at the reappearance of his Master,—as if such an abuse of the Divine name had been as general then in Judea as it is now in Europe, and as if an Israelite would not have recoiled with horror from so frivolous an abuse of the sacred name—“My Lord and my God”—as from a blasphemy which deserved stoning! But thus does God abandon those who wilfully oppose His Word, and faith in it, to the maddest, wildest conceits. Even at the present time they are visited with this preliminary judgment, that they render themselves ridiculous in the eyes of all reasonable men; nay, more, absurd in those of children. Enough, Thomas had, in an unequivocal and becoming manner, done homage to the Lord Jesus as his Divine Lord, and as the heavenly King, whom all the prophets had most explicitly pointed out as the future Messiah. In his confession, Thomas most justly places the risen Saviour upon the throne of the eternal Majesty, and assigns to His pierced hands the reins of universal government as belonging to Him the Lord of all. And what is our Lord’s bearing when the disciple falls at His feet with this mighty testimony? Does He decline the lofty title reverentially addressed to Him by the disciple as one too high, and not justly employed with reference to Him? Does He recoil from the disciple who thus acknowledges Him, as did Paul and Barnabas afterwards from the Lystrians, with the words, “Thomas! thou blasphemest! thy Lord and thy God is in heaven, and I, like thyself, am but His servant?” By no means. The Lord accepts the testimony in its full scope and weight, and does so with exalted calmness; nay, He even corroborates it by



saying, "Now, Thomas, believest thou?" Be, then, convinced that it was with good reason that we said our story would throw a new, refulgent light upon the person of the Lord Jesus, and His more than earthly dignity. It most certainly appears from it that the titles Lord and God are applicable to Him in their full and unimpaired import; for if it were not so, Thomas must have been mad to have bowed the knee whilst saying it; and Jesus himself would have been guilty of blasphemy, a crime punishable with death, in receiving such homage. This is the alternative; and there remains nothing open to us more rational than to bow the knee to Him also, and to unite in the reverential exclamation, "*My Lord and my God!*"

IV. Our Lord, in reply to Thomas's confession, says, "*Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they which have not seen, and yet have believed!*" A reply full of meaning, but which, nevertheless, involves something that at the first glance might astonish us. Was Thomas, then, who only believed because he had seen, not blessed? Truly, indeed, we see him in an ecstasy of joy and delight at the sight of his risen Master. But the word "blessed" signifies far more than such an exhibition of rapturous joy. It indicates perfect content in the absence of all desire—sabbatic peace; now the state of mind in which our disciple found himself differed from this, inasmuch as Thomas, from want of a thorough perception of his own need of salvation, was unable to perceive the real aim of Christ's incarnation, and could not appreciate what he really possessed in a living Saviour. If his consciousness of his condemnation before God had been more thorough and comprehensive than it now was, and if he had had a deeper insight into the nature of sin, as well as into the holiness of God, and of His inviolable and irrevocable law, he would never have been



scandalised by the sufferings and death of his Master, but would, on the contrary, have recognised and seen it to be an absolute necessity for the expiation of the sin of the world, and for the mediatorial redemption of the common guilt of the human race. The sacrifice of the Mediator under the curse of the law would long since have appeared to him to be an indispensable requisite of the Divine work of redemption, and even before the notification of the resurrection had reached him, he would have been thoroughly confident that the Lord had risen; nay, that He must live again, because it was perfectly inconceivable that God should allow the Shepherd of the sheep to be imprisoned in the tomb, after He had blamelessly fulfilled His saving mediatorial work on the cross. If the risen Saviour had then met him, he would have greeted Him with inexpressible joy, but without being surprised at His reappearance, or, at least, without consternation. The disciple would have been sure the Redeemer had risen even before He presented Himself in person to him; and if Thomas had read in the healed wounds of the Messiah, as out of divinely-attested documents, the intelligence of the finished work of redemption, accomplished for his sake, he would only have rejoiced to find himself thereby strengthened in consolations which he had before participated in and enjoyed. Thus, you see, had Thomas, under the circumstances suggested, believed before he saw, when faith was turned to sight, he would have been truly blessed, whereas we now see him only intoxicated with joy, and almost lost to self-possession through ecstatic emotion.

Our Lord's declaration, "*Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed,*" admits of no application to us, save as it confirms and blesses the conditions of belief which are now usual and normal, and leaves us without a motive for envying those who once saw our Lord personally and



bodily living upon earth. The faith of Christians of the present day is not based upon their senses. It rests on the threefold witness of the Word, of the Holy Ghost, and of inward spiritual experience; and its operation is thereby rendered only so much the more certain and efficient. Enlightened by the Holy Ghost, we feel ourselves to be poor sinners, needing grace, mediation, and redemption. But this need is met by the gospel message in the Saviour's invitation—"Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." To see Him in spirit, to hear His voice, to perceive the aim of His mission, and to feel in the inmost soul, "Thou art my Saviour, or there is none," are one and the same thing. We feel ourselves cast on Him, and we recline confidently on His heart; and as we recognise the sun by the bright, warm rays which issue from it, to illumine, fructify, and quicken, so also do we recognise Him as the Son of God and our Mediator, by the heavenly peace with which He refreshes our fainting souls, the sanctifying grace and power which He infuses into us, and by the courage for life and death with which He arms us. Thus do we believe *without seeing*, and that which we are permitted to behold, either in remarkable answers to prayer, or in wondrous providential aid, or even in trances and visions, we gratefully welcome as a refreshing, vivifying, and strengthening addition to our faith. But our faith is not founded upon it; it subsists without it, resting on stronger and firmer pillars.

May the Lord assist us, where the work has not already been done, to that faith which is a fruit of the right perception of that which ought to be believed! John says, "*It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.*" May the deep meaning of these words of the apostle be disclosed to us all by personal experience! The key to all the



treasures of grace is prayer. Let us, therefore, heartily join in the longing desire which rings in the beautiful words of the old hymn:—

“Yet grant the eye of faith, O Lord!  
To pierce within the Holy Place,  
For I am saved and Thou adored,  
If I am quicken'd by Thy grace.  
Behold, O King, before Thy throne  
My soul in lowly love doth bend,  
Oh, shew Thyself her gracious Friend,  
And say, ‘I choose thee for mine own.’”

*W. C. Dessler 1692.—Lyra Germanica.*



## X.

## THE APPEARANCE AT THE LAKE.

"YE are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world." Thus did the Lord address His disciples in John xv. 19; and in so doing all who belong to Him. They are in the world, but no longer of the world, since they have experienced a thorough spiritual transformation. They form a new race, though commingled with the old one. Not as though they had been withdrawn from the condition and relations of secular life. In their domestic, professional, and social engagements you will hardly be able to distinguish them from the better part of the children of the world; nevertheless they walk, as these dimly perceive, as *strangers* among them. In their opinions, sentiments, and bias of such, they differ essentially from them. Baptised and imbued with another spirit, they love and suffer, reason and determine, work and rest, mourn and rejoice, in a totally different manner. Where they act the same as their brethren in the flesh, still what they do is totally different in character. They travel a higher road, they breathe a different atmosphere. An opportunity will now be given us to take a broader view of that new divinely-transformed life; and God grant that we may be attracted by it, and personally enjoy it!

JOHN xxi. 1-14.

"After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. There were together



Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore; but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore; and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now, when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself unto the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship, (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples after that he was risen from the dead."

What can be more tender, significant, and touching than this Gospel? The reflection of another world is spread over it. It is no fiction—it is historical—and bears in all its features the impress of truth, stamped with a distinctness transcending that of almost every other history. But, notwithstanding this, the historical incidents present at the same time to the spiritually-enlightened eye an allegory, rich in thought, in which the object symbolised is nothing less than the whole Christian life, in all its most essential outlines and relations. And it is from this point of view that we purpose treating the engaging story. The life of believers is revealed to us in it—1st, as one issuing in eternal results; 2dly, as one of a holy brotherhood; 3dly, as a life of cheerful contentment with our earthly lot; 4thly, no less than one of



uninterrupted heart-elevating expectancy ; 5thly, as a life in which faith is alternately tried and victorious ; and, 6thly, as a life of blessed anticipations, with reference to both this world and the next. Let us contemplate this life of faith in these aspects, and may God grant that the longer we live the more we may realise it !

I. The scene is in Galilee, where our Lord desired His disciples to meet Him, and probably in the fishing village of Bethsaida. What *great things* can we have to seek here ? More indeed, beloved, than the unimposing place would lead us to expect. We behold a spiritual Pleiades, a constellation which will one day spread its enlightening and vivifying splendour over the whole world. In Simon Peter and his six companions we see the members who constitute this constellation. Listen to the topics upon which this small circle of friends are engaged in such animated conversation. It is true they incidentally speak about their nets, the fish which they have caught, about the market, and the earning of their daily bread ; but besides these, and with far deeper interest, they talk of something else. What have these intimate friends of Jesus of Nazareth, who died, slew death, and brought life and immortality to light, not gone through ! What incomparable treasures of the soul, comprised in elevating recollections of the past, in a happy consciousness of their present filial relation to God, and in thrilling expectations for the future, do they cherish ! If ever man's life may be said to have been full of *instruction*, then—who will dispute it?—*theirs* was. In how infinitely higher a degree was theirs such, than the life of thousands amongst us, judging from the tone of conversation pervading our social meetings. But all that, in the possession of which these friends at Bethsaida rejoiced, is essentially the inheritance of the whole Church, which has attached itself, and will continue to attach itself, to these disciples, as to a



spiritual centre of crystallisation. I do not merely mean the Church of the orthodox, but also of all the hearty believers baptized into, and imbued with, the spirit of Christ; in whose diaries are to be found the records of something beyond their mere secular experience and engagements in every-day life; where, in a parallel column to the history of their earthly bodily life, there is another of higher importance—the history of their souls. They have to tell one another of matters relating to an invisible world in which they live,—of views of eternity which delight their souls,—of divine leadings and revelations in answers to prayer, and in wondrous providential aids vouchsafed them,—of the possession of more than earthly treasures, as, for instance, the impression of divine grace within them,—a joyful, child-like confidence in the Almighty, of a powerfully germinating seed of future perfect sanctity implanted in the very centre of their being,—and of many other things incomparably delightful! Enough; the life of faith alone has a real imperishable purpose, worthy to be striven for by man, created as he is for immortality. Where faith is wanting, the most splendid earthly lot is poor and empty, and the most valuable cargo with which our bark of life can be freighted is but empty chaff to be driven before the wind.

II. The men whom we find at Bethsaida, besides Simon Peter, are Thomas, Nathanael, John, James, and two whose names are not recorded. In them is represented—albeit in the germ—the communion of saints, which essentially differs from what the world calls friendship and fraternity; and of its fervour and depth no one has any idea who has not himself been admitted to it. When the whole human race shall belong to this communion, the golden age will have come. There is much talk in our days about a great “bond of brotherhood,” in which the whole world should combine, though there never before was so much hatred, discord, and



party-spirit to be met with on earth as there is just at this time. Men dream of bringing about this universal fraternisation without Christ and His gospel; and it never occurs to them that such a hope is an attempt to "gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles," (Matt. vii. 16.) The natural man deceives himself, when he imagines that he is able to seek something other than himself, and what belongs to self. His strongest impulse to undertake and to carry out any enterprise is, and remains, "egoism," which is no more to be banished by good resolutions than by grand and high-sounding words. Tell us, you who are still growing on the natural trunk, whether you have any idea of a community in which all struggle is at an end, except the contest who shall deny himself most for our Saviour's sake, or who shall outvie the other in unreserved submission to Him,—of a community in which all its members are divested of envy, save envy that a better opportunity had been given to others than to us to practise their active self-denial,—of a community in which no desire more rules the soul than this one, that Christ should increase and we decrease; and where the brethren are no longer known according to the flesh, but are lovingly embraced as participators in a common salvation, as those who with us rest in the bosom of the same love, and are journeying hand-in-hand with us towards the same common home, the same Father's house,—a community from which lying and deceit, the bane of worldly friendships, are forever banished,—a fraternity in which all that a man has is looked upon as a divine loan, interest on which is payable in services of *love*. Here, indeed, *what* of earthly good has fallen to the lot of any man is accepted gratefully; but in comparison with the "treasure in heaven," it is regarded only as a fund to defray expenses in our short journey through the vale of tears. Be assured that this is no fond imagination, no unattainable ideal, glimmering from afar;



but an organisation existing within the range of fact and reality, which throughout all ages is recognised by the initiated as the heavenly and imperishable kernel which is preserved within the shell of the visible Church, and forms the germ of that glorified race of men, in whom hereafter the saying will be fulfilled in its highest and most glorious sense : "Man is become as one of us ;" and the saying of John, "As He is, so are we in this world." The new creature, created after God "in righteousness and true holiness," has not now to be discovered for the first time, but has already long existed, though at present only in a state of development, and is found in all those who are truly "in Christ Jesus."

III. The evening is closing. Then *Peter says to his companions, "I go a-fishing."* "*We also go with you,*" was the reply ; and no sooner said than done. Until they receive further instructions, they resume their former simple occupation. And why should they not willingly take to their nets again, if such be their Lord's will ? The Christian life of faith is here represented to us as one of *cheerful contentment with our earthly lot and calling*. Whatever be the honest business and work in which we are engaged, we prosecute it with cheerful spirit and energy. For, in the first place, we shall, whilst performing it, regard it as but for a season, from the consciousness of our far higher destiny. But then it will be performed in the name of the Lord Jesus, who assigns to every man his post, and measures out to each his field of labour, who can be served just as well by the day-labourer as by the discharge of any other duty, and whose name can be praised and glorified in the most circumscribed sphere. Furthermore, duty, where incumbent, is to be performed without desiring fame or acknowledgment ; for how does all honour with which the world could reward us fade before that which we already possess, "whose names



are written in heaven!" And lastly, we work at it without grief or anxiety, as if the apostle's encouraging declaration were still heard by us, "*He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*" Listen to what transpires in the houses and cottages around you. Oh what ill-humour, discontent, sighing, murmuring and complaining is there everywhere! What is the cause of all this? Simply because people have missed the gospel source of joy and peace. It is not the outward situation in which any one is placed, no, unbelief is the first and most efficient cause of all the misery in the world, and the real, inward, cancerous affection which preys upon the whole human race.

IV. It is a question whether all the disciples at Bethsaida were fishermen. But they all go willingly on the lake. What wonder? Not only does their Master's promise, "*After that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee,*" still ring in their ears, but they are attracted more powerfully by the remembrance of all the glorious incidents which they had previously been permitted to witness on the lake to which they are now about to go. The confession may not mutually be made aloud, but, individually, they are preoccupied with the thought that possibly something they have longed for may now take place. Thrilling anticipations course through their hearts, and all true Christians of the present day experience similar emotions. The life of faith is one of uninterrupted heart-elevating expectancy. Of what? Do *they* also expect their Lord to present Himself to them bodily? Far from it. But, relying on His word, that He will be with His own even to the end of the world, and on many other definite promises and assurances, they are ever more or less anxious to observe how He will help and deliver them,—here through His word, or in some other way, giving them counsel; in other cases, undoing the tangled knots in



life,—in noting how He will promote the work undertaken for His glory, and crown it with success and blessing; how He will overcome this and that hindrance to the prosperity of His kingdom; or in what other manner He will reveal His gracious presence, and prove His mercy and His love. How pleasant it is to anticipate the visit of a valued human friend! What must they have felt when expecting Him who reigns supreme in heaven as being about in some way or other to display His favour and power to them! What could be more elevating and delightful! It is to occupy a fixed position in the vestibule of the heavenly throne-room, and to stand constantly waiting expectant before Immanuel's door. And what does king David say from his own experience? "*They that wait on the Lord shall not be put to shame;*" and Solomon, prompted by the Holy Spirit, adds, "*The hope of the righteous shall be gladness.*"

Yes, it is so. But it does not always happen at the very time that we could have wished it. Our fishermen cruised about the lake the whole night; but they take nothing in their nets, nor is any appearance vouchsafed them, as they had secretly hoped. But the Christian has to maintain his self-composure under heavier trials than these. It may sometimes appear to him, as though he were wholly disregarded by the Lord, and as though his deeds, prayers, and sufferings, were so likewise. Such experiences are indeed bitter, but they are salutary. Ask the believers of every age when they have become most thoroughly conscious of their unworthiness in the sight of God, and when they have most fervently and ardently repeated the words of the Canaanitish woman, "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table;" ask them, when they have been wont, in the exercise of bare faith alone, to cling to the sure word of prophecy, and when their heart vented itself in the words of David, "*Unless thy law had been my delight, I should*



*then have perished in my affliction,*" (Ps. cxix. 92 ;) ask when they first experienced in themselves not only the pain, but likewise the blessing, and healing powers of wrestling with God as did Jacob ; when they were first able to resign themselves in perfect submission to the will of God with an unconditional surrender ; ask all this, and they will all, with one voice, answer, "Not when the Lord allowed everything to fall out as we wished, but *then*, when He hid His face from us ; when we, with other tears than those which the poet of this world sheds, 'sat weeping on our bed throughout the wearisome nights ;' nay, when we seemed as the forsaken and rejected, 'those whom the Most High had wholly deserted.' " But they will also add, with countenances beaming with delight, "The time of divine consolation has always returned." *The life of believers is one in which faith is alternately tried and victorious.*

V. Early day is dawning over the lake of Gennesareth. There emerges from the morning mist the form of a man on the distant shore. Our fishermen take him to be a fish-dealer, one of those who daily come out at dawn from the town to meet the boats, and make their purchases. But *we* know the mysterious stranger better. He is the omnipresent and eternal Guardian of Israel. Everywhere and ever at hand, with His beloved ones whilst traversing the sea of life. "*Children,*" cries the unknown one familiarly to the fishermen, "*have ye any meat ?*" He asks as to their success in fishing. The answer is abrupt and quite despondent, "No." A question addressed to us by God himself lies involved in every trouble that befalls us, and if we immediately answer as in the sight of God, "*No, we have nothing,*" we have already advanced one step towards our peace. The stranger calls to them, "*Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.*" With what assurance does He desire them to do so. Might not the fishermen by this have recognised the



speaker? They indeed throw their net, and, as it would seem, heedlessly, as though thinking, if they gained nothing, yet they would lose nothing. But who shall describe their astonishment, when, upon endeavouring to pull it up again, they find their utmost efforts unequal to raise it, "for the multitude of fishes." The circumstance is immediately suggestive of an intimation to the mind of one of them. And to whom does it occur? Why, to him who understood our Lord's manner best, and who was adorned with the most beautiful title that mortal ever bore; namely, that of *the disciple whom Jesus loved*, "and who leant on Jesus' breast." John, with sparkling eyes, whispered to his friends, "It is the Lord!" Upon this, another, whose ardent temperament will not permit him to wait till the boat was brought to shore, girding his fisher's coat quickly about him, boldly leapt overboard. With energetic strokes he divides the waves and swims before the vessel towards the point where stood the wondrous Personage. Who this hastily-resolved person was, I scarce need say, for who could it be but Simon Peter? What prompted him to do so? It was undoubtedly his ardent love to his Lord and Master. Ay, but he had moreover another especial reason. He was already pardoned, but whether he had regained the full confidence of his Lord and Master was to him a matter of doubt, so long as our Lord had not reinstated him in his forfeited apostleship. He had been forgiven on the early morning of the resurrection-day. But was the sin which he had committed really *forgotten*? Until Peter be assured of this, he has no peace, he cannot look up joyously. He will be both the first and the last to lie at the feet of the risen Saviour, until the blissful declaration is made to him, "Yes, thy sin is for ever blotted out!" "*It is the Lord.*" Oh! do not doubt it, this cry resounds over and over again in the life of believers; and what a day of rejoicing beams upon us when, after protracted and deep gloom, the long-



desired Prince of Peace again, and suddenly, appears, with help, comfort, and kindness ! And He always does return. "*Light*," sings David, "*is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.*"

VI. The disciples in the ship, dragging the full, heavy net after them, arrive with beating hearts at the landing-place. Yes, John was right ; it is the Master. His present appearance certainly differs from what it was when living amongst them ; He wore the form of a servant. But they already behold Him in His glorified body, and to no one of them does it occur to ask who He is, and to grieve Him again by unbelief. And what do you see near Him ? A glowing fire of coals, and on it, preparing for their early repast, fish and bread. This is wonderful ! But did He ever appear, during these forty days, save in some wondrous fashion ? Of all marvels, He is personally the most marvellous. We are here again convinced that He belongs no longer to the earth, but to another sphere of life, to another order of things. After His resurrection, therefore, it is not recorded of Him, as before, "*He came*;" but, "*He shewed himself*," (John xxi. 1 ;) that is, coming forth from the invisible world, He entered the visible one, from which He retired again as soon as He had accomplished His purpose. "*Bring of the fish which ye have now caught*," says He. Again it is Peter, who is first at the vessel, pulling the net to land, and who fetches some of the great haul of fish. And John, an eye-witness, observes, "*The fishes which they had caught were an hundred and fifty and three*," great ones ; "*and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.*" "*Come*," continues our Lord, kindly inviting the disciples, "*Come and eat.*" They circle round Him. He then takes the bread Himself, and hands it to them to eat, and fish likewise. On every occasion upon which our Lord presented Himself to the disciples subsequent to His resurrection, it appears to have been His design



first to convince them that *He* was again there before them *Himself, personally and bodily*, and then to free them from the delusion that He would continue the same social relations with them which He previously had sustained. In the scene now brought under view, the former aim preponderates. It is, moreover, pregnant with real and holy symbols. It contains promises, concerning the apostolate, that they should never see the spiritual net which they were about to cast torn; furthermore, assurances of the never-failing providence of God in those seasons when His servants go forth armed to the fight; and, above all, a significant symbolical representation of the ultimate result of the whole voyage of life, when He, in like manner inviting His children to a far more bounteous feast, after all the gloom and weariness of their earthly existence, will welcome them to the other shore, and give them the crown of life. Truly the life of believers is one of most blissful prospect for the world that now is, and of perfect happiness for that which is to come.

I take it for granted you are convinced that there is, even on earth, another life which differs in all respects from our every-day existence, passed in earthly trouble, earthly joys, and earthly cares—a life under the opened heaven already illumined by the splendour of eternity—a life which even from its outset has a glory more than earthly. The life of men spiritually crucified, and now risen with Christ, in whose lips the following passage is a realised truth—“*For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ,*”—the life of all those to whom the words of the apostle are applicable, “*Your life is hid with Christ in God; when Christ, who is your life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*” May no one of us be condemned eternally



to view this life only wistfully and from a distance, as one strange to us. On the contrary, may it, by God's grace, become our own !

“Lo ! Thy presence filleth now  
All Thy Church in every place !  
To my heart, oh enter Thou ;  
See, it thirsteth for Thy grace !  
Come, thou King of glory, come,  
Deign to make my heart Thy home !  
There abide and rule alone,  
**As** upon Thy heavenly throne ! ”



## XI.

## PETER'S LOVE TO CHRIST TESTED.

THE apostle in 1 Cor. xiii. 13, having first placed faith and hope side by side with love, says, "*But the greatest of these is love,*" (charity.) It may be asked, Why the greatest? First, because, unlike faith, which will be converted into sight, and, unlike hope, which will be converted into fruition, both thus undergoing change, love, being in its nature divine, will pass over unaltered into the world of glory, in order that, freed from all earthly shackles and dross, it may there become perfect; secondly, because love, as the noble blossom of faith and hope, may be said to comprise them both—a statement which cannot be made with equal truth of either faith or hope with reference to love; and, lastly, because love is the fulfilling of the law, since he who loves God no longer considers His divine precepts as literal commands external to himself, but has them in himself as constituting the principle of his inmost life. But however true all this may be, we should better hit the meaning of the apostle if we accept that he calls love "the greatest," because we, through love divesting ourselves of self, become wholly God's, are brought into union with Him who is love, and are assimilated to Him; and whilst in believing and hoping we are rather passive, and resign ourselves to be influenced by Him, by love we are raised to fellowship with His divine working, or, as the apostle says in another place, "*We then are made*



*workers with Him.*" What a precious treasure then is the love which the apostle here has in view, and which forms the foundation of the new life of those who are born of God! We shall now have a further opportunity afforded us to speak and to hear more of this love. Ought we not all most heartily to rejoice in it?

## JOHN xxi. 15-17.

"So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep."

A touching narrative, my brethren; nay, more than touching. How often have our hearts been stirred within us when meditating upon it; but does it not seem ever new, like the opening spring, the starry vault of heaven at eventide, or sunrise amid the rosy hues of the dawn? The oftener we examine it, the more its beauty grows upon us; and the more we attempt to fathom its treasures of thought, the richer do they appear. Truly this Gospel speaks to us in exceedingly tender tones, and needs a delicate and practised mind fully to apprehend it. In spiritual life, there are many grades of susceptibility, and many stages of culture. Not all who have experienced the loving-kindness of God see with equal clearness, and enter with equal depth and fervour, into spiritual matters. It occurs but to few to lean with John on Jesus' breast, and to watch the lightest pulsations of His divine and tender heart. May such delicacy of perception not be wanting to us whilst we are engaged in meditating upon this narrative. Yet this Gospel contains



enough of that which can be easily conceived and comprehended by all, to relieve us from solicitude, lest any should wholly fail to profit by the study of it. To what shall we then specially direct our attention? I think that the question of the risen Saviour respecting love to Him ought to be the single subject of our present contemplation. Let us observe then, first, that love to Christ furnishes us with *the measure of all true human worth*; then how does this question point out to us *the roots and foundation of all new divine life*; and lastly, *how it shews and reveals to us the way to the most honourable and blessed position*. May the Lord in mercy acknowledge our word, and may the Holy Spirit lead us into all truth!

I. Let us return to the shores of the Sea of Galilee. A beautiful spring morning illumines the scene before us, and is quite in harmony with it. Lo! yonder stands the risen Saviour! How sublime and gracious is His bearing! The seven disciples, happy beyond measure at the gracious condescension He has vouchsafed towards them, surround Him, their host, at this extraordinary entertainment. Their countenances beam with joy. One alone stands with downcast looks, depressed. His clothes, still dripping, render it easy for us to recognise him. He it is who, in order to be first at his Lord's feet, by swimming outstripped the slow progress of the ship. What is it then that still lies so heavily upon his heart? Was it the lamentable transaction in the courtyard of the high priest's palace? Doubtless the crushing remembrance of that will never be entirely extinguished in his soul. But he likewise will never forget that glorious incident, wholly unparalleled in its nature, on Easter-morn, when suddenly the Master, whom he had so disgracefully denied, stood before him, glorified as the conqueror of hell, death, and the grave, and personally assured his contrite heart of full forgiveness. Peter's absolution, pronounced by



Him whose pardon he knew was as valid in heaven as it is upon earth, would not have been exchanged by him for a kingly crown. The declaration received then still remains his most precious treasure—a jewel he will never part with ; for it guarantees to him nothing less than the future favour of God and everlasting blessedness. But is Simon then not yet set at ease ? No, no ; not yet. His Lord has not yet restored him to the apostleship, which he lost by his triple denial ; and until this be done, he cannot breathe freely. But is it possible for one who has fallen so low to find courage to make such a request ? Oh ! do not judge too hastily ; enter fully, if possible, into the disciple's feelings. He truly cares not for his reputation in the eyes of the world, but solely for a valid pledge that he again possesses the whole heart, the undiminished confidence, the entire affection, of his glorious Lord. But such a pledge he could only recognise by his Lord's recalling him to apostolic service. He dares not say as much, but he does not doubt that the Searcher of hearts will read this latent desire in his soul. Do you not herein begin to perceive in what true love to Christ consists ? This love shews itself in an intense longing to be firmly and confidently assured of the love of the Lord Jesus towards us. So long as we only slavishly endeavour to fulfil our Lord's commands, in order that when He comes to judge the quick and the dead at the last day, He may have no very great sin to upbraid us with, it is very questionable whether a spark of love to Him gleam in our hearts. It is possible that, notwithstanding a *moral* striving such as this, which is entirely opposed to the *Christian* character, we may stand in no personal relationship to the Lord ; rather in secret alienation from Him, feeling only sullen ill-humour and discontent at the "too heavy yoke" with which He burdens our flesh by His precepts and ordinances. We do not love Him until we feel the assurance of His love to be the



most precious thing which we could possibly desire. But if it be asked how, and by what means, we know that the Lord really loves us, let the sequel serve as a reply. A lively, sincere desire to rest in His love may serve as an indication and pledge to us that the heart of the Friend of sinners is already graciously inclined towards us. But His gracious disposition is especially to be seen in the way in which He leads us, supplies our most urgent wants, listens to our sighs, and answers our prayers. May our attention ever be most solicitously fixed on these points! We often pray for this and that, which, when granted, leaves us so wholly occupied with the aid afforded, and the material benefit received, that the gracious answer to prayer therein experienced is entirely lost sight of by us. In a blindness that is incomprehensible we forget the Giver in the gift, and thus lose the noblest and best blessing comprised in the benefit vouchsafed us.

Our Lord, with a seriousness tempered by kindness, looks at His disciple, and questions him respecting his love to Him. And the same question He puts to us, and to all the world too. The question involves a high sense of personal worth. The inquirer recognises in himself the individual to whom the devoted attachment of all mankind is due as tribute. At the same time this question indicates to us the rule by which all true human worth is to be measured. If you do not love Jesus, it is clear and evident that, notwithstanding all the outward shew of respectability and virtue which you may make, your moral worth is nothing, because you characterise yourself as a creature whose inner life is stifled and dulled to such a degree that there is no faculty left to receive the reflection of the Sun of righteousness. For beyond every attribute, Christ bears in Himself the perfect image of God. From Him there beams on you all the fulness of Him who is the eternally true, good, and beautiful. Yes, *even holiness itself*, and consequently the ideal of humanity, is in Him



come down from heaven to earth. If you do not love Jesus, neither do you love light, but are a child of darkness. Then, despite your name of Christian, how far are you behind that wise heathen of ancient times, who perceived and confessed that "virtue would never be taught by precepts, but that it would then first be rendered intelligible when it appeared on earth in a living person, who would incline the world to love it;" and who, had he met with Christ, would doubtless have fallen at His feet with ardent devotion?

If you do not love Jesus, you are blind with regard to your *own real condition* to the same extent as you are with regard to every moral object really noble and great. Were you enlightened, ay, did you but know one-half of what you truly stand in need, you would immediately give your whole heart unreservedly to Him who announces Himself with the assurance, "*The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.*" The indifference manifested by you to this Divine Physician, Redeemer, and Mediator, condemns you at once as most grossly infatuated, lost to all truth, and entangled in lies, illusion, and self-deception. You think yourself in health, whilst labouring under a fatal malady; free, whilst in slavish fetters; righteous, whilst guilty of the whole law. Would you not declare a man insane if, having lost his way in a desert, he turned his back upon a person who offered to be his guide; or who, when dying of thirst, should scornfully repulse the friend who came to shew him a spring? Such a one however, or a shipwrecked mariner tossed about by the winds and waves, yet disdaining to enter the life-boat approaching to save him, would be far less foolish than the wandering sinner who carelessly passes by Jesus, the Saviour from all distress. We should call the conceit of such a man, which makes him think that he can do without the heavenly Prince of Peace, absurd and ridicu-



lous, were it not that the ruin which it will bring upon him is so fatal and tragic.

If you do not love Jesus, you betray, lastly, a want of spiritual elevation, which strips you of the last remnant of moral dignity. Your inability, not only to recognise the divinity which shone forth in Him, but also to appreciate the numerous favours and privileges for which, despite your unbelief, you have to thank Him, is glaringly exposed. Tell us whence comes that political order under which you feel yourself so secure? whence that dear domestic life which encircles you as with a hedge of roses? whence the refined manners which adorn your social life? whence that sound mental culture in which you so much rejoice? whence the higher view of the purpose and ultimate aim of the existence of the earth, in which you have been instructed from childhood? and whence those elevating images of an invisible and ideal world, which, though dimly seen, like stars shining afar off, have nevertheless found their way to your mental vision? Whence all these things? Did not Jesus create and organise them? And you do not love this Jesus! Besotted, blinded, mortal! say where can we look in you for that spiritual and moral worth which will entitle you to a claim on our esteem?

II. We say further, that the question of our love to Christ is one and the same as that concerning *the foundation and nature of the new life begotten of God*. With everything that might otherwise decorate the man, the very germ of *the divine nature* is wanting where that love has not yet been kindled. Therefore, Simon Peter is first prompted to look for this sacred spark in his soul; and not until he has discovered it, is he justified or enabled to expect anything good for his future life.

Let us now look at the remarkable trial which he has to undergo. The Lord begins to speak to him. They all hang on His lips, but no one so intently as Simon himself. Oh,



thinks he, would that He may act but forbearingly towards me! The Lord begins, "*Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?*" What does this question mean, which all at once re-opens the scarcely-healed wound in his conscience? Like the stab of a knife, it gashes his already poor and dejected heart. Every word in it, every syllable, is crushing—"Simon, son of Jonas." How strange, how chilling, does this appellation sound! That is his old name again, the name which he bore in the days of his blindness and estrangement from God; and not his new one, not "Cephas" or "Peter," his name as a disciple and apostle! How can this designation imply any good to him? And then the "*Lovest thou me more than these do?*" Simon understands but too well this reference to the past. The "*Lovest thou me MORE?*" threatens almost to annihilate him. Once he had imagined that he indeed did so. "*Though all men should be offended with thee,*" once lightly escaped his lips, "*yet will I never be offended; though I should have to die with thee, yet will I not deny thee;*" and only a few hours afterwards, alas, how had he fallen! What a recollection!—a draught more bitter than gall, and here poured out for him by the Master himself! Simon's whole soul bleeds once more, and the comfort of the pardon which had been granted him is dissipated like water on a heated surface. He is sad, sad almost to death. But the Master asks, and it is but seemly that Simon answer. What! in the same terms, "*Yea, Lord, I love Thee more?*" No, never! never again! Well then, "*No, Lord, not more than these do?*" Nor this either. It will never occur to him again to compare himself with others. Shall he then say, "*No, Lord, I love Thee not?*" All that is in his heart would revolt against that as against the blackest lie. Shall he then directly and freely testify, "*I love Thee truly, my Saviour?*" His inmost feeling would stamp this testimony as true and



well founded; but such an expression would die upon his lips; for he would remember, the high-sounding asseveration which he allowed to escape him on the way to the Mount of Olives was not hypocrisy, but sprung from his inmost soul, and yet only rested on most grievous self-deception. The poor disciple is in deep distress. He would have preferred to give his soul vent in silent tears. But speak he must, for the Master has put a question to him. Yielding to the melancholy pressure, his troubled mind makes way for itself, and Simon answers with great tact, whilst most truly, and with deep emotion, "*Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee.*" It is, then, "*Yea,*" and rightly so. This "*Yea*" came from the very inmost depths of his soul. But, nevertheless, he cannot bring it out simply, unreservedly. Fearful lest he again prove the victim of self-deception, he invokes the co-operation of the Searcher of hearts, to aid him in the examination of his own, and that He may search into its very inmost recesses. "*Lord,*" says he, "*Thou knowest*"—But what comes next? Is it, *whether I love Thee?* He might have wished to say so, but the spirit of truth within him opposed the "whether" as a false and affected humility, and substituted the word "that." And thus a confident, "*Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee,*" escapes from Simon's lips. "Oh, see Thyself," is the meaning of his words, "how all my longings, hopes, and desires, would, like tendrils, clasp and hail Thee, who art my only One, my All!" His Lord owns it, and, with infinite gentleness, hastily raises His profoundly-dejected disciple, and gives the royal mandate, "*Feed my lambs!*" which was tantamount to saying, "*Now, be my apostle again!*" Simon hardly dares to trust his ears. Seldom has any one experienced a more rapid transition from the deepest compunction to the most blissful joy than he. Just before he was a worm crawling on the ground, and in a moment he sees himself



raised again to one of the twelve thrones which shall far surpass those of the most brilliant of earthly monarchs. He could call upon heaven and earth to help him to render thanks, and to rejoice.

But what fresh incident is about to befall him? Simon arms himself for a new struggle. Yes, it sometimes happens that sudden and speedy reverses occur in the life of believers. Simon experiences this in the most astounding manner. The Lord fixes His eyes upon him once more, and, as it appears, more earnestly than before, and says, with still greater emphasis, "*Simon, son of Jonas, LOVEST thou me?*" Simon noticed that the Lord this time laid special stress on the word "lovest," as if He would say, "This is no slight matter; the love which I demand is perhaps quite a different thing from what thou hast been accustomed to call by that name. It is more than a mere natural flickering, flaring fire; more than a mere fleeting paroxysm of enthusiasm, kindled by the miraculous splendour which adorns my life; more than a sentimental admiration of my moral beauty, or of the elevating thoughts of eternity with which my word has overspread the darkness of earth as with a starry heaven!" Simon perceives the great scope of his Master's question, and at the recollection of the love which he had once so loudly boasted, he could anew for very shame have hid his face. Again he looks searchingly into his soul, and, if I am not mistaken, I hear the following soliloquy going on there:—"How, wretched sinner, do matters now stand with thee? What is it to love Him? what does it mean? Is it to find no rest but in Him, not to be able to remain where He is not, to know nothing sweeter than His name, and to prefer never to have been born rather than to be obliged to live without fellowship with Him? Is it to see heaven in the gracious expression of His eye? to feel indifferent to every person and every-



thing in heaven and on earth, if we have but Him and His consolations? Is that loving Him? Oh, then, the Master himself may be my witness, that at least some small spark of love glows in my heart towards Him, in spite of all obstacles." Thus he thinks, whilst devotedly and fervently issues from His lips the assurance, "*Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee!*" And the Lord, confirming it, says a second time, "*Feed my lambs.*" Then Simon is again raised, intoxicated with joy, above all the heights of this earth, and is well-nigh dissolved in gratitude and delight.

Has this scene of trial come to an end? Not yet. Love to Christ is an important topic, and one not lightly to be disposed of. A third time the Lord, stirring the very depths of the disciple's soul, says, "*Simon, son of Jonas, lovest THOU me?*"—and now the word "*thou*" is obviously the one emphasised. Simon stands dismayed. Why marvel? By this third question it was palpably our Lord's design to remind him of his thrice-reiterated denial. Simon, again ejected from his high heaven of joy, thinks, "Truly, Lord, if my asseveration, weighed by Thy balance, has ceased to be of value, I, faithless boaster, have fully deserved it!" Oh, what sorrow invests his soul! But he quickly resumes his courage, thinking, "If my love were once a lie and a deception, it is *no longer* so to-day. I am at least convinced that Thou, Lord, art the sole object of my affection, the only Rock on which I trust. Thou mayest slay me, but I shall never leave Thee again. Wert Thou to consign me to hell, Thou wouldst still be the magnet to which my soul is attached." So he thinks; and looking at his Lord, how tumultuously does his heart beat and throb! How could he refrain from making a renewed and stronger testimony of his love? As if he would say, "Be Thou thyself witness between Thee and me, Thou who searchest the heart and



triest the reins," he says, overcome with sadness, but, nevertheless, with great decision and confidence, "*Lord, Thou knowest all things ; Thou knowest that I love Thee.*" And now the Lord gives free course to His own love too. All His purposes are attained. Simon's threefold denial has been revoked by His threefold confession. Simon is restored to the brethren, and the brethren are restored to Simon ; and, what is far more to him, his Lord is restored to him, and he to Himself. The Prince of Life looks upon His disciple, refined by the fiery trial to which he had just been subjected, with ineffable kindness, and addressing him in a tone which manifestly proved his final reinstatement in apostolical functions, He says to him, "*Feed my sheep.*" Happy disciple ! What a treasure is that which thou hast gained ! Thou knowest that thou really lovest Jesus thy Saviour, and this love is the foundation of the new life, begotten of God, the root and source of all sanctification, truly acceptable to God ; the "fulfilling of the law," as Scripture testifies, and the sign-manual put on the children and heirs of God.

III. When will it come to pass, my friends, that we also shall, unitedly and severally, be able to answer the question, "*Lovest thou me ?*" with truthfulness as deeply felt, and with the same depth of meaning, as did Peter, "*Lord, Thou knowest all things ; Thou knowest that I love Thee.*" As long as we are without this love, our existence is meaningless, our heart a wilderness, our whole life a parched tract, which will at least bear no fruit for heaven. Without the love of Christ, we are like a vessel without mast and without rudder, tossed on the ocean of life ; without this love, no tie unites us to the heavenly world, and we have laid up no treasure for eternity.

The heart can never rest until it repose in the love of Jesus ; and neither shall we be truly loved, nor shall we love



our brethren, until the love of Jesus is shed abroad in our hearts. This love implants within the bosom an Eden of quiet bliss, whose flowers are unfading. It sheds upon our earthly career a gleam of the glory, a faint reflection of the unseen world which awaits us above; it confers a nobility which the mists of the poorest temporal circumstances can never obscure. Yes, if we love Jesus we have re-attained to the true original dignity of man; we have been restored to the most honourable position, and really raised again to the same elevation on which our first parents stood before the fall in paradise. We are received again into fellowship with God, are embraced and sustained by the love of God, and once more love what is divine and everlasting. We soar on wings of blissful hope above the heights of earth, have conquered the world, sin, flesh, and the devil, and are, no less than Peter and his fellow-apostles, each one in his own degree and in his own way, appointed to be the salt, the light, and the benefactors of this world, which we are traversing, indeed, as pilgrims and strangers, but cheerfully, under the fatherly eye of God, in the consciousness of His Divine complacency, and under the guardianship of angels, being well assured that we shall reach our home at last.

If, then, love to Jesus be so great a matter that it alone can give meaning to our life and warrant to our hope, how can we rest until we feel its holy fire glowing within us? But this love cannot be gained by working; it must, as the apostle says, "*be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.*" We make room for this love, we prepare a place for it, when we first bring ourselves into the light of God's countenance, and become fully conscious of the lost estate, of the absolute alienation from Him, into which we all, without exception, originally fell. The first tear of godly sorrow which trickles down the cheek may be considered as a pledge that the moment is not far distant when the love of Christ



shall cheer thy heart likewise. Love to Jesus takes its source in the conscious apprehension of His redeeming love. This experience, of all others the most desirable, must, however, remain unknown to us, until we have been awakened from that most wretched and pernicious of all dreams, the dream of self-righteousness. Let us, then, most earnestly implore the Lord to deliver us from that bewildering enchantment which by nature enchains us all, and pray as in these words—

“ If Thou, True Life, wilt in me live,  
*Consume whate'er is not of Thee ;*  
 One look of Thine more joy can give  
 Than all the world can offer me.  
 O Jesus, be Thou mine for ever !  
 Nought from Thy love my heart can sever—  
*That Thou hast promised in Thy Word !*  
 Oh, deep the joy whereof I drink,  
 Whene'er my soul in Thee can sink,  
 And own her Bridegroom and her Lord.”

*Sinold, 1710.—Lyra Germanica.*

The hour will come to each and all of us when, from the mouth of Him who will award the final sentence as to our eternal destiny, the question will, with most solemn intonation, be addressed to us, “*Lovest thou me ?*” The Lord, by His Holy Spirit, help us then to answer, with as much truth as did Simon Peter of old, “*Lord, Thou knowest all things ; Thou knowest also that I love Thee.*” **Amen.**



## XII.

## PETER'S WAY.

"HE *that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.*" Thus spake the Lord in Matt. x. 38. Whom does this passage not terrify? He has often repeated it with emphasis, has placed it, as it were, at the head of His programme. Nowhere does He make it more apparent that He neither aimed at organising a political party, which should bear Him aloft with acclamations as its glorious chief, nor, like the wise men of this earth, at forming a school which should trumpet its Master's name throughout the world, than when He makes such a demand as the above the indispensable condition of admittance into His kingdom. What does the word *cross* signify but a combination of the last degree of ignominy with the most *intense suffering*. And this is the mode in which He enlists all those who are disposed to devote themselves to His service! They must whilst living not only make death an element in their calculations, but reckon upon suffering continuous shipwreck of their plans and fortune, as also of all their worldly projects, desires, and aspirations. We see that our Lord can only avail Himself of the services of disciples who have the salvation of their souls more at heart than anything else, and who are so deeply and overwhelmingly convinced of their lost condition that to them no sacrifice, by which they might obtain grace and forgiveness, appears too great, not even



were it the most precious and the dearest they possess. But these large demands, which our Lord makes of all those who are anxious to attach themselves to Him, justify us, however, not only in confidently inferring that His own self-consciousness, as the only Saviour, is clear and certain, but also that the blessedness which He has to offer, in compensation for a life of self-renunciation and self-denial, is truly great. However much the flesh may be alarmed at the terms of the passage, "*He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me,*" it is nevertheless, when closely scanned, rich in comfort and promise; and we shall see that it was received as such by a disciple, to whom it was applied with most especial and terrifying emphasis.

## JOHN xxi. 18-23.

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"

This is the concluding scene of the manifestation of the risen Saviour at the Sea of Tiberias. What a wondrously bright picture does it present, and how powerfully are we again struck by the fragrance of historical truth! That which is here narrated can be no fiction. Art cannot spin and weave such delicate threads as here present themselves; life itself alone could. Observe especially these last historical incidents of the gospel narrative, and say whether you consider it possible that the imagination, even of the most gifted human poet, could have devised such a scene as the one before



us, in which everything is so evidently not of this world, and yet breathing the living freshness of unequivocal reality. What a variety of wholesome truths are here presented to us, most simply attired, and covered only with the slightest veil ! Come, let us listen attentively to our Lord's continued conversation with His disciple Peter ; and let us notice first, *the intimation made to Peter* ; then, *the question which the disciple addresses to our Lord* ; and finally, *the answer received in reply to the question*. The narrative involves much more than is expressed. May the Lord assist us throughout our meditations, revealing that which shall be profitable to us !

I. Peter is abundantly comforted. Our Lord has reinstated him in his apostleship, a dignity previously forfeited by his denial of his Master ; our Lord did so upon his confession, "*Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee*"—a confession made in the deepest humiliation, yet with firm confidence. Our Lord, as it were, restores the sword to Peter, having already pardoned his former desertion. Peter has attained the pinnacle of happiness. But our Lord's tender care for His disciple extends still further. It is His purpose to free him from solicitude as to whether he will remain steadfast in his love ; to arm him for the days of combat on which he is about to enter, with the conscious assurance that he will remain faithful even unto death ; and at the same time so to forewarn him, that when again overtaken by trial, he shall never allow it to surprise him, or to cause his faith to give way. Moreover, He designs to clip the wings of his too easily excited feelings, in order to preserve him from fleshly vain-gloriousness, and to place as it were a monitor in his heart, which at every step he took should bid him ejaculate a prayer, tempering his fiery character by the companionship of a salutary sadness. Our Lord accomplishes all this by a prophetic announcement which was enough to make



him stagger, following, as it did so closely, his reinstatement in the apostolic office.

He begins with a "Verily, verily!" You know this His form of asseveration, which impresses on whatever follows it a seal that stamps any one who would call its truth in question with the guilt of high treason. In the use of this word "verily," He engraves that which He is about to say on the apostle's memory as with a brazen style. With an echo that will never become fainter, he will hear it resound throughout life. And when that which was now shewn him in the distance should actually befall him, that word "verily" would serve to support the consolatory conviction that the Lord, cognisant of his future destiny, had not averted it, simply because He foresaw that it would be advantageous and salutary for him. Peter then knew that whatever happened to him formed an indispensable part of His gracious leadings, and that nothing in the world gives so firm a footing as a word from the mouth of the "true and faithful Witness." Let us also rejoice that the most important revelations and teachings of Holy Scripture are confirmed by our Lord's asseveration, "Verily, verily." Not only does this expression, "verily," place them in an elevated position like beacons, but our Lord, at the same time, pledges for their truth the glory of His divine mission—ay, all His prophetic and moral honour. "*I say unto thee,*" the Lord proceeds to declare to Peter, "*When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest.*" In a wider sense this declaration is true of man's youth generally. In the full consciousness of his expanding vital power, the young man fancies himself able to make his way through all obstacles, and, were it requisite, to move mountains. But our Lord has our condition by nature especially in view, which is one of alienation from all fellowship with God, since man, listening to no other suggestions than those which



his selfish interests dictate, steers through life by a capriciously-selected course, and unfurls his sails to no winds save those which favour his own plans and desires. A man then says, "It is my will and pleasure to do so and so," and, in the absence of all restraint, imagines himself to be perfectly free; whereas in reality he is only the slave of his passions, if not, indeed, of a dark and gloomy spirit, of which he himself is at present entirely ignorant. Man, moreover, has no idea that he is being led about in leading strings, and not only so, but that every creature, even that which struggles the most against it, is in the same plight—led about by Him who does as He wills both in heaven and on earth. A Nebuchadnezzar unwittingly indulged his pride while in the fetters of Omnipotence, and a Cyrus, utterly unconscious of it, only executed *His* behests. On being brought into a state of grace, man resigns his *natural freedom*, which is only an illusion and a lie, to the sovereign will of the Lord of lords, submitting himself unconditionally to His guidance. Not, however, until we are thus subject to Him are we really free; for man, delivered from the snare of the devil, and from the dominion of sin, is, in the ardour of his love, willingly subject to the Lord, and ready to execute his commands. There is a stage, however, in the state of grace likewise, to which our Saviour's address to Peter may be applicable. The period in which "*a man girds himself, and walks whither he would*," is likewise that which we are wont to designate as that of first love, and we do so willingly, though the designation be not strictly accurate. We then spread wide our sails in all the joy of faith. All that we desire is realised, and whatever we undertake for the honour of God succeeds. Answer upon answer crowns our prayers. In profession and in action we venture everything, and everything succeeds. It would seem as though the Lord had placed all the riches of His gifts, His power, and His aid at



our command. Of these we almost dispose at pleasure. Assured of success, we apply ourselves, now in this way and now in that, to the furtherance of the kingdom of God, and, under the Divine blessing, everything prospers. At this season it seems as though the Lord wished to bring us near to Himself, and, by the successful experiences with which He favours us, to provide a viaticum for our further journey. But this course of things will not last always. To days of such continued joys—to such eagle flights—there generally follow days of another complexion, when, in the words of the prophet, a man's soul seems to be "*even as a weaned child*," and he has to prepare himself for a future similar to that which our Lord disclosed to Peter.

"*But when thou shalt be old*," continues the Lord. "Yes," think ye, "old age will preserve us from too rash enterprises, and is only too well fitted to temper and to quell the insolent 'I will.' " But, my friends, do not anticipate the future; rather listen to our Lord. "*But when thou shalt be old*," He says, "*thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not*." How does Peter receive these words? You will not do him injustice to suppose that, startled at first, he shrank back at the words, "*and carry thee whither thou wouldest not*;" for such is the experience of all who walk in the way of the Lord! Man would then fain do *this*, but he must do *that*. Inclination points this way, but the path to be trod lies in the opposite direction. Israel would fain go to Canaan, but they are ordered to go to Marah. We had hoped to gather roses, but thorns and thistles tear our hands. Is not, then, the will of the regenerate in harmony with that of God? It is; but though restrained, the old nature still lives along with the new, and for the former the cross is variously shaped. The spirit willingly accedes to this crucifixion, but the flesh trembles and recoils from it. Nor is it always the



*natural will* which has to be denied. It is not unfrequently imposed upon us to deny the will of the regenerated spirit. Fain would we attain sanctification with the rapidity of flight, and yet we see our goal ever receding from us. Fain would we stand fast in the faith, and the Lord allows whole swarms of the most painful doubts, like locusts, to settle upon us. Fain would we ever feel the flame of devotion burn on the altar of the heart, and breathe even now the balmy air of paradise, in the full enjoyment of Immanuel's presence; and we find ourselves in a wilderness, suffering the most trying spiritual deprivations, and we starve, despite all the promises by which we should be comforted. To promote the glory of God, we would fain attempt great and praiseworthy things innumerable, and yet are constrained to see our fairest, noblest plans, one after the other, wrecked. What could be more painful than all this? But what was there aimed at in it by God's counsel and will? We must learn to yield up ourselves fully and unconditionally to the Lord, and to rest satisfied with His grace. The more we are thus exercised, the more freely and the more richly will the powers of Divine grace develop themselves in us, and the more useful shall we become as instruments in the hands of Him who wills not only that His name shall be glorified *in us*, but likewise *through us*.

Not for a moment does Peter doubt whether our Lord's mysterious address was merely intended to prepare him in a general way for a life of trouble, but he holds it to have been intended to convey a distinct intimation *of the mode of death by which* (as the evangelist expresses it) "*he should glorify God.*" The words, "*When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thine hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not,*" had already depicted to him in the clearest characters the public issue of his earthly pilgrimage. "*Thou shalt stretch forth thine*



*hands.*" How well does he forebode both *the mode and the design!* "*Another shall gird thee.*" Who is *the other?* "Yes," thinks Peter, "it is He above, without whose will not even a sparrow falleth to the ground; but besides Him—the imperial Roman executioner!" He "*will gird thee!*" Peter knows right well why he will do so. "*And carry thee whither thou wouldst not.*" What other spot presents itself to the mind of Simon than the bloody mount of crucifixion? Had his interpretation of his Master's address been other than that which he felt bound to give it, all hesitancy as to his right apprehension of it was removed by its expressive final clause, "*Follow me.*" It was now clearly revealed that Simon would one day share his Master's bloody fate. The end of his earthly journey was to be marked by a cross; and if from this time it spread a dark shadow over his whole life, if a settled melancholy tempered the confidence of his faith, if all the splendour of this world lay bare before him in all its nothingness, who will marvel at it? When subsequently we hear this blessed disciple speak, or when we read his epistles, frequently it will occur to us that the *cross* is clearly present to his mind, and that the sight of it deeply moves and touches him. It is true the cross would secure him the desired opportunity of covering and obliterating his sad denial by a noble confession. Simon was to "*glorify God in his death,*"—i.e., he should not only seal and confirm his faith as having been wrought of God, but become an object in whom God would glorify the power of His grace in rendering it equal to the terrors of death. He was to travel in the same path as his heavenly King, and follow Him, not only as far as the disgraceful and torturing death of the martyr's stake, but go, at the same time, further still, into the realms of bliss. What a prospect is this for him! How it must have raised him, and have sweetened all that awaited him! But, nevertheless, there it was on record,



*"They shall carry thee whither thou wouldest not."* His human nature strove and quailed. In the meanwhile, Simon, be assured it is thy Saviour who has fixed all that shall betide thee, and who will never leave thee nor forsake thee!

Our disciple knows this, too, himself, and though not exulting, nevertheless goes on steadily in the way which is assigned him. "But," I hear you say, "a cross, the reward of the disciple's unreserved resignation to his Lord and master! An appointment to the scaffold, the earnest of his renewed apostolate!" Be not perplexed by this, my friends! Thousands of times you will see the children of God walking in far more difficult paths than most of the children of this world. He who seeks a smooth path and shuns thorns, had better give up following the Lord at the outset. The poet sings, "God's ordinance is sure, and remains for ever unmoved. When the conflict is over, His friends and wedding guests shall be made happy;" and in another verse of the same hymn, "Those who dwell in Salem's walls shew their crowns of thorns." The Lord is only concerned that His children be prepared here below to be "vessels of honour," and fit for the heavenly life. Hence the flesh must be crucified, that the spirit may have room for its free and unbounded flight.

II. After our Lord had raised the veil from the closing scene of His disciple's earthly pilgrimage, He turns round and leaves the spot. Simon does so too, as though he would at once typically fulfil the command, "Follow me." And he follows, not only with his feet, but with all his heart. How absolutely freed from all earthly ties does Peter feel himself by the revelation just made to him! and how wholly is he thereby cast to depend alone upon the Lord! As if the bloody hour were already come; and just as a child keeps near its mother when danger threatens, so would he fain



cling to the Bridegroom of his soul with all the grappings of his mind now melted in silent grief. And it is so with *our* hearts too, after having been long cheered with the sunshine of Divine complacency, when we behold the dark shadows of sorrow or of approaching death settling on our life. If love to the Lord have for a while lain dormant and inert within us, how does it waken up again with renewed energy, and how intensely and sensitively conscious do we once more become that He is our only comfort and our only refuge in life and in death ! Our affectionate yearnings and our affianced, developing themselves afresh, clasp Him with all their young tendrils, and are in harmony with the deep truth expressed by David in the words, "*How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God ! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.*" "*Thou hast been my help. My soul followeth hard after thee : thy right hand upholdeth me.*"

But what does Simon still desire of our Lord ? Nothing, but that he may be permitted to remain near Him. Were fiery billows surging between him and Jesus, Peter would swim through them to Him, as he once before had swam to Him through the waves of the sea. What wondrous magnetic influence has the person of Christ upon a sinner thoroughly aware of his poverty and helplessness ! There is nothing in the wide world which equals the attractive and enchaining power, which He exercises upon a contrite soul convinced of sin. It is then first learned that the climax of future bliss will consist in seeing Him as He is, and in dwelling ever near His throne ; and the words of Asaph, "*Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none on earth that I desire beside thee !*" most happily express the feelings of the swelling heart.

Simon, following the Lord, had advanced but some few steps, when he looked suddenly round. In search of whom ?



Next to the Saviour himself there was, as you know, no one so near his heart as the friend whom he at this moment saw at a distance following the Lord likewise. It is *John*, who here again introduces himself under the charming and significant title of which he is so fond. He describes himself as "*the disciple whom Jesus loved.*" Yes, the love of Jesus to him, of which he had received so many and such delightful proofs,—Christ's love to him, and not his love to Christ,—was his boast, as it also was the source of all his comfort and of all his hope. But why is it that John precisely here makes mention of that affectionate intimate relation with which his Master honoured him? The motive is so much the more pleasing as it is truly touching. He thereby manifestly seeks to invalidate the charge of forwardness which might have been raised against him for having ventured to follow his Master, when he was in the act of leaving, without waiting for an invitation to do so. It is as if he would say, "*I dared* to do it, as the disciple who lay on Jesus' breast. I dared to do it all the more readily, since on that evening when Christ declared, 'One of you shall betray me,' I knew the corruption and the weakness of the human heart sufficiently to distrust myself, that if the storm of temptation should burst, and I were not upheld by grace, I myself might be hurried away to commit that crime, and hence, therefore, was the first to say in astonishment, 'Lord, is it I?' Is it then unpardonable in me, if I too, as well as my brother Simon, heartily desire to hide myself under the gracious protection of the Lord who is my only rock and sure defence, as a chicken under the wings of the parent bird?" Perhaps John wished to give us to understand this, by recalling an incidental scene at the Last Supper.

The ties of friendship which bound Simon and John to each other were closer than those which in days of yore



united David and Jonatnan. Cast but a glance upon the pages of New Testament history, and you will almost always find these two together—the character of each respectively being so beautifully the complement of that of the other. And would you read Peter's life without the blemishes which here and there, in the other three Gospels, mar the portrait of that apostle, who is so deserving of love, read it in the *fourth*, where nearly everything which could be alleged against John's beloved friend, is alluded to in the most sparing manner, and covered with the mantle of love. And without prejudice to historical truth, there is here thrown, even upon Peter's denial, a softer light, because John takes a part of his friend's guilt upon himself by his mention of another "disciple" who had introduced Simon into the high priest's palace, and who had therefore brought him to the fatal snare; and this "disciple" is, beyond doubt, no other than John himself.

Now when Simon, most profoundly moved by the recent announcement, looking back, sees his friend John, what train of thought stirs within him? "Ah!" thinks he, "were you only to remain with me, and were it permitted us to fight and die for the Lord together!" And with his mind so occupied, every sorrow seems lighter—even the dreadful cross itself appears less terrible. We can appreciate the feelings which involuntarily suggested the question, "*Lord, and what shall this man do?*"—a question which has no other meaning than this, "What path in life will he have to pursue? will he be my companion, and share my lot?" And surely such a feeling cannot incur our censure. It is so human, and is based only upon tender, brotherly love. The bitterest trial is alleviated when shared by a congenial friend. And what a friend and companion he had in John! To Simon abundant comfort and encouragement were in-



volved in the thought that our Lord would grant him his heart's desire in uniting the path of his bosom friend with his own. But how does our Lord answer him?

III. His answer is not severe, neither does it put His disciple to shame. He knows the poor human heart, and compassionates our weakness. But Simon is not spared a well-meant repulse. A salutary lesson was conveyed by his Master's answer to him, and to us likewise. Our Lord says, "*If I will that he [John] tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.*" An utterance of majesty, intoned and delivered as from the throne of the Most High; but perfectly becoming in Him, to whom, after He had fulfilled His great work, all power in heaven and on earth was given. In sovereign omnipotence, He freely disposes of all that have breath, but especially of *their* lives and destinies whom He has bought with His blood. At His sacred pleasure He determines the plan of their lives, and, unshackled, He leads and calls one in this way and another in that. His will is universal law; to it every creature is subject, and one day all tongues will be constrained to confess that He is Lord, to the glory of the Father. The time is coming when those who blasphemed His holy name, with Satan and Antichrist at their head, shall lick the dust from off His feet, and tremblingly acknowledge "Him whom they pierced."

"*If I will,*" says our Lord. How is the great armada of contradictions and objections to His Godhead dashed to pieces upon this His royal word! How shall they, who pretend that Jesus never declared Himself to be anything higher than one of us, save as He was mentally and morally pre-eminent, get over this passage, "*If I will,*" without laying down their arms? How can they manage with this passage, who, with shameless audacity, make the random assertion that Christ never challenged for Himself any other sway than that which He exerted upon earth by His own *example*, and



by the *spirit of His teaching*? Oh, what a different estimate will they one day form of His power and dominion! If He only "*will*," He can in a moment destroy, by the lightning of His anger, the whole band of His opponents; but He can just as quickly, without effort, and by almighty grace, change the lion into a lamb, and raise up from stones children to our father Abraham.

"*If I will that he tarry till I come*," says Jesus; and we reply, "Yes, Lord, if Thou wilt, John shall not die, but shall remain to the last great day!" But the Master does not intend to extend His disciple's life until that time. Many indeed have understood these words to signify that John should never die; and this opinion prevailed even to the time of Augustine, for we find the legend, that at that day it was currently believed John had been indeed buried, but that he was only slumbering in his grave, and that any one carefully observing it might see the earth over him gently heave with his breathing. But John himself corrects this misconception in his Gospel. In it, speaking of this subject, he expressly says, "*Jesus said not unto Simon, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?*" But how are we to understand these words? Our Lord evidently referred to His impending judgment over Jerusalem. This overthrow, which attained, in the destruction of the temple, its dreadful, and in every way important, consummation, both symbolical and historical, was—as it involved the final abrogation of the Old Testament economy—of the greatest importance to the kingdom of Christ and its development. This event, which laid the foundation of a new epoch in the Church of God on the ruins of the former one, which was removed but to make way for the new era, John survived and witnessed. But the view entertained by those who said, "*This disciple shall not die*," nevertheless approved itself true in a deeper and more spiritual sense.



John lives among us in his writings and in his character even to this hour, and will continue to do so, to the joy of all God's children, to the end of time.

But the lesson which Simon and all his future companions in the faith should derive from our Lord's response is clear. The Lord leads each of His people as in His divine wisdom and love seems to Him best, each in his own peculiar way. He appoints to every disciple his lot, as each severally has need; and, educating one in this way, another in that, He makes them meet for everlasting life. This is the meaning of His words—"If I will that John should arrive at his destination by a smoother path than thou, Simon Peter, what is that to thee? resign thyself to my guidance, and 'follow thou me.'" Peter has now thoroughly understood his Master, and assuredly will never ask again, "*What shall this man do?*" but will make the words of David his own, "*As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so shall my eyes wait upon thee, O Lord!*" With confiding humility, he is contented to submit himself wholly to the guidance of Him whom he loves, and never will he allow the "*Follow thou me*" to slip from his memory. And, in fact, he did follow his Master even to that mount where he stretched out his hands, another girding him and leading him whither the inclination of the flesh most certainly "*would not.*" Tradition reports that he was crucified A.D. 64, during Nero's persecution, but with his head downwards, because he refused to die in the same position as his Lord and Master had done, as being an honour far too great for him. Peter has been honoured, and not unreasonably so, with the name of the "*Apostle of Christian hope.*" Since our Lord, as we have seen, had fixed Peter's horoscope, a deep inward longing for heaven pervades all his discourses, as



well as his two epistles, and the object of his sight, thought, and expectation, is everywhere the "*day of the Lord*."

May the expression, "*What is that to thee? follow thou me!*" be brought home to our hearts also, and may we be contented and happy when we but know that we are under *His guidance*. That which the sacred hymnologist, Gottfried Arnold, sung more than a century and a half ago, originating in his own rich, heartfelt experience, still remains true, and will continually receive fresh testimony :—

"How blest to all Thy followers, Lord, the road  
By which Thou lead'st them on, yet oft how strange!  
But Thou in all dost seek our highest good,  
For truth were truth no longer couldst Thou change.  
Though crooked seem the paths, yet are they straight,  
By which Thou draw'st Thy children up to Thee,  
And passing wonders by the way they see,  
**And learn at last to own Thee wise and great. Amen."**

*Lyra Germanica.*



## XIII.

THE RISEN SAVIOUR SEEN OF MORE THAN  
FIVE HUNDRED WITNESSES AT ONCE.

WHEN the apostle John (chap. xxi. 25) concludes his Gospel, or rather his narrative of the manifestations of the risen Saviour, with the words, "*There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written,*" we are not to explain it away as mere hyperbole or exaggeration. The word in the original\* is not to be understood as referring to space, but to spiritual comprehension. In this latter sense, we must also accept the same word in Matt. xix. 11—"All men cannot *receive* this saying, save they to whom it is given;" and in the verse immediately following, "He that is able to *receive* it, let him receive [*i.e.*, comprehend] it." We know what the scriptural designation "cosmos" (κόσμος) means—viz., the world. What John intends to say amounts to this—If all that the Lord had said and done upon earth, especially in His glorified form, had been recorded in detail, of what advantage would it be? Enough has been narrated for those who are anxious for salvation, and for believers. The evangelist says this himself in another passage, (chap. xx. 30, 31,)—"And many other signs truly

\* *χωρῆσαι*, *receive*; figuratively, *comprehend*. In Luther's version it is rendered *begreifen*.



*did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through his name.*" A more ample, a more extended narrative would oppress rather than elevate, would suggest difficulties rather than convert, since, without doubt, far more wonderful incidents than those related, belonging to the now glorified life of the risen Saviour, and extending far beyond our every-day experience, and the limits of the laws of nature as known to us, might have been given. That which has already been reported excites thoughtless and sceptical astonishment enough, among the children of this world, to make them shake their heads, and is more than sufficient to exasperate their sinful prejudices. To have increased the number of these incidents, by the addition of fresh manifestations, still further beyond the field of human vision and experience, might possibly have transcended the comprehension and the faculty of spiritual digestion even of the better disposed, nay, even of real believers. But it has nevertheless pleased the Holy Ghost to inform us, through the apostle Paul, of some things concerning the forty days which are not found in the Gospels. That this must have been done with some special design is very apparent. This design will unfold itself to us as we more closely examine the apostolic communications in question. Let us begin with the consideration of an Easter scene, which seldom receives the attention of which it is in the highest degree worthy.

## 1 COR. XV. 6.

"After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep."

Repeatedly had our Lord intimated to His disciples,



“After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.” We know, from the apostle’s declaration, that “God hath chosen base things of the world, and things which are despised, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are ; that no flesh should glory in his presence,” (1 Cor. i. 28.) The inhabitants of Judea, and especially those of the Holy City, looked down with pride and haughtiness upon Galilee as spiritually and morally degraded. But what does Scripture say?—“Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” To our Lord it seemed that there was no place so needing His help and salvation as Galilee. What wonder, then, that our Lord, at least until the formation of the Pentecostal Church at Jerusalem, obtained the majority of His disciples from the Galileans. And this explains why He selected this province to be the principal theatre of His personal manifestations after His resurrection. It is to one of the last of these—that on which He vouchsafed to present Himself to more than five hundred brethren at once—that we are now about to direct our attention. All that is reported to us concerning it seems, at first, like the frame without the picture. But when examined more closely, the painting itself will likewise disclose itself to us : and, in the first place, *the scene throws a corroborating light on the ministry of Jesus whilst on earth ;* then it serves as *a fresh confirmation of the resurrection ;* and, lastly, it gives *a clear idea of the great results of Christ’s resurrection.*

May we become more fully conscious of it, and, by our meditation, promote our own peace and welfare !

I. Our Lord appeared to “five hundred brethren”—*i.e.*, to five hundred believing disciples—“*at once.*” This account fills us with surprise. We could hardly have dared to calculate upon so rich a result from His labours. During His earthly career, we had imagined that the hundred and twenty faithful ones, whom we find assembled in the porch of the



temple shortly before the feast of Pentecost, constituted the total gains of His ministry of love. During the three years of His public labours, we have seen Him, with the exception of the twelve and the seventy, almost ever surrounded by decided enemies, or by crowds who only shouted their hosannas to Him as long as they were held by the illusion that in Him their carnal ideal of the Messiah would be realised. In the measure in which this idea was dissipated were their loud plaudits silenced, and the "Crucify him!" of the scribes and Pharisees was substituted as the watchword of public opinion. Even the sick and impotent, whom our Lord miraculously healed, but very seldom give us reason to hope that they recognised in their Deliverer from bodily infirmities *Him* whom, had they been anxious for salvation, they would have embraced with eagerness as the Physician and Saviour of their immortal souls. Of the thousands whom He had miraculously fed in the desert, more than a few certainly did continue for a while to follow Him. But why? Simply "for the sake of *the meat which perisheth*," as He himself upbraided them. Of the ten lepers whom He relieved of their frightful disorder by His creative fiat, only one returned to thank Him for the ineffable benefit which they had all received. Whether Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, whose little daughter was raised to life by Jesus, ever became His disciple and follower, we know not. Nay, we read nothing of the kind with reference to the two blind men at Jericho to whom He restored their sight; and we even hear Him saying, with an accent of serious warning, to the man whom He had relieved at the pool of Bethesda of a disease of eight and thirty years' standing, when He afterwards met Him in the temple, "Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." After such notices, the little company which Jesus gained to His banner during His earthly course could be but very insignificant in point of numbers,



and would seem but as a drop in a bucket; and this might easily, in some measure at least, diminish the high idea which we had cherished of the power of Christ's personal influence, and of His superhuman glory breaking forth through the veil of His outward form of a servant, as also of the irresistibly attractive power of His gracious and love-breathing nature. Suddenly, however, a multitude of Galilean converts attract our notice, of whose existence we had not previously the remotest idea. They are more than five hundred in number, and in a moment the danger is over of our entertaining unworthy conceptions of the sublime form borne by the only-begotten of the Father before His exaltation. Those believers all saw and knew the Lord Jesus *personally*; they had carefully observed and followed Him in all the most varied circumstances and relations of life. As they had seen Him in mere human fashion discharge all the duties of social life, as son, brother, friend, as the guest of His friends, and as a Teacher of Israel, so had they likewise been witnesses of His superhuman deeds and wonders, and had ever had the best opportunity of hearing His incomparable addresses and teachings. And the total impression which His personality made upon them was so great and overpowering, that, without a moment's hesitation, they submitted to Him for time and for eternity, not only as the Lord of heaven and the King of kings, but rather as that Being in whom alone they recognised the Surety of their future bliss, and the only Saviour of their souls, who most perfectly corresponded to their holiest aspirations. But this is also of the very highest importance to us. A radiant splendour is poured over all the life and actions of our Lord, even prior to the hour of His exaltation, when we draw the inferences—which we are justified in doing, from the sudden presentation to our notice of a body of disciples which had previously been wholly concealed—that there were other similar ones in the country,



equally quiet and hidden, of which history makes no mention, and that there were, moreover, very many more such at the time when our Lord closed His earthly career. At the same time, the account with which Paul here surprises us is quite calculated to make *the present* appear to us in a more consolatory light. Throughout modern Christendom, the greater part of which is in a backsliding state, there may yet likewise be, apart from those who let the light of their confession and of their lives shine in the darkness, a company of Christians, veiled and hidden, which will be brought to light as soon as the great sifting of the nations, which assuredly is imminent, shall take place; and then, from the mouth of another than that of Moses, this cry will be heard, "*Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me,*" (Exod. xxxii. 26.)

II. Those brethren, exceeding five hundred in number, whom the apostle mentions, were now likewise in Galilee, when the manifestation of their risen Master was vouchsafed to them. In what place He discovered Himself to them we do not learn. Doubtless, the scene of this heart-cheering meeting was some solitary, unfrequented spot, possibly a mountain or a desert, where the friends had assembled to avoid the persecution of their countrymen. We are not informed whether they met there in consequence of some influential suggestion that they should do so, or whether they had agreed upon this meeting, for the purpose of general edification, mutual encouragement, and confirmation in the faith. We only learn in a general manner, that the risen Lord revealed Himself to them, and to them all *at once*. Nothing transpires concerning the *manner* of this revelation. It must have been a very impressive scene. Imagine this numerous assembly of true believers, gathered together under the open canopy of heaven, joyfully excited by the news which had reached them from Judea, burning with desire to



hear it more distinctly confirmed. And lo ! suddenly, ere they are aware of it, He, who fills their whole soul, Himself stands in their midst in all the splendour of His new life, and salutes them with His sweet Easter greeting. What important communications He must have had to make to them, and how must every countenance have been lighted up with more than earthly joy ! Truly indeed, if fancy, developed in poesy or myth, had had any share in the composition of the New Testament scriptures, *this* scene would not have been passed by without being embellished in every possible way. Here, to an extent transcending all that could be found elsewhere, seem to be materials for description and for painting. But how simply, how unadorned, how soberly, and almost dryly is the grand and elevating occurrence related ! It is communicated to us in the plainest chronicle style, without the least mixture of poetic embellishment ; so that it is at once evident, that here there was no other purpose than that of simply reporting what had been really seen and heard. But this most firmly establishes the authenticity of the Holy Scriptures, and more especially that of the New Testament. Read it wherever we may, the inevitable impression, and that which strikes us beyond everything else, with reference to its authors, is, that we have, in them all, to do with sincere and upright men. At every step of their narrative we are met with the fragrance of artless truth and simplicity.

It might, indeed, be asked, why the apostle did not report that wondrous manifestation of our Lord to this body of more than five hundred disciples in a less circumscribed and more detailed manner to us, since he, undoubtedly, was in a position to do so. Let this answer suffice, that whenever he took up the pen, he was under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who ever knows what is profitable, and how rightly to apportion it. The necessary light has been shed on the fact and fruits of the resurrection of Christ, by the more detailed



accounts of the four evangelists. Those narratives do not allow us even for one moment to doubt that Christ really left His tomb, and that in a glorified body. They further supply us with the most consolatory proofs that He, in His majesty, may still be looked upon by us as the same kind and condescending friend of sinners which He ever was before ; that it was not until He had thus fulfilled His work of redemption, that He honoured His believers with the endeared appellation, and one so full of promise, as "*brethren*." And lastly, they assure us that, though unseen, He will remain with us just the same that He was before His ascension, even to the end of time. What then do we further need ?

Too much cannot be said in attestation and confirmation of the historical truth of the resurrection for us who are weak in the faith. And because this miracle forms the foundation upon which all Christianity is based and supported, the Holy Ghost condescends to our necessity with especial munificence, and has been willing to do that for its maintenance which I might designate as an act of supererogation. Hence it was that He moved our apostle to this supplementary communication of the scene of which we now treat ; and, indeed, this announcement serves to crown all the proofs of the reality of the resurrection of Christ. Paul wrote his First Epistle to the Corinthians about A.D. 54, and it is a fact incontrovertibly established, one no longer denied even by the most sceptical, that Paul of Tarsus, and no other person, really is the author of that epistle. And since this man, who bears the stamp of sincerity on his brow, publicly states before all the world, that the risen Saviour upon one occasion appeared to more than five hundred brethren at once, of whom some only were fallen asleep, whilst the majority were still then living, he must, of course, have been prepared, on this disclosure being made known, to see himself assailed on all sides by the question, where these witnesses were to be met with. But he



was also perfectly prepared for these inquiries, and was ever quite ready to answer the inquirer with still more explicit statements. Thus every one who was disposed to do so, saw, in the love of truth, and the something more than a tincture of enthusiasm by which Paul and his fellow-disciples were characterised, enough to warrant his placing his confidence in them ; and saw likewise enough of the way already open by which they might arrive at the fullest conviction of the historic truth of the resurrection. Such a one only needed to resolve to go round and visit the friends, whom Paul would willingly have more definitely pointed out to him, in order to hear from the most temperate, and, at the same time, the most credible witnesses, the unanimous assurance, "Certainly, He is alive again, the Lord who died upon the cross. We saw Him with our own eyes standing bodily before us, and He said so and so to us!" But in my opinion the apostle himself here figures as an adequately sober and reliable witness. It is impossible that *he* should be a fanatic, who says with all calmness and self-possession, "What I tell you really took place ; but I do not desire that you should rely upon my testimony alone. There are others, more than five hundred of them ; go and ask them, and they will all confirm by oath what I tell you." This apostolic appeal to a company of witnesses, of whom, at the time when he appealed to them, the greater number were still alive, must for ever free us from the slightest doubt concerning the greatest, and, as to its results, the most important event in the history of the world. The apostle's assertion is of no less weight to us than would be the corroborative testimony of the five hundred brethren, had we questioned each one personally ; and nothing is more certain than this, that much obstinacy and wilfulness are involved in withholding belief of the resurrection of Jesus ; whilst but a few grains of the love of truth are needed



to enable us joyfully to meet the exclamation of the Scripture witnesses, "*The Lord is risen!*" with the response, "Truly, *He is risen again.*"

III. The apostle writes, "*Some*" (namely, of the above-mentioned witnesses) "*are fallen asleep.*" It is evident that he purposely and deliberately employs this consolatory expression instead of the harsher one, "*They are dead;*" thereby designating the *fruit* of Christ's resurrection and the operation of faith in it. Through it death is swallowed up in victory. To characterise death as sleep, and dying as falling asleep, would previously have been strange and unusual to the Israelites, and, indeed, to the world at large. We first meet with it here, in the mouth of our Lord, when the death of Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary of Bethany, had been notified to Him; He then informed His disciples of it in the words, "Our friend Lazarus *sleepeth.*" But they, His most intimate friends, did not then understand Him; for in reply they uttered a trite and commonplace truth, inapplicable to the facts, and said, "Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well." At the announcement that Jairus's daughter was dead, our Lord calmly observed, "The maid is not dead, but *sleepeth;*" whereupon the messengers, who flattered themselves upon their superior information, laughed Him to scorn. After the resurrection, however, this very consoling mode of expression became, and very properly so, more current in Christian circles. Modern philosophical criticism has not ineffectively assailed the arguments, based upon reason, used to prove the immortality of the soul; now, the arguments that conclusively establish a continuous personal existence after death, especially those employed in our days, in favour of the immortality of the soul, involve nothing more than is comprised in that one argument which is based upon the fact of Christ's resurrection. The apostle



likewise is of the same opinion, and expresses it in the words, "If Christ be not risen, then is your faith vain, and the dead rise not." But that one argument is amply sufficient to convince us that dying is only a falling asleep to awake again; an awakening, however, that will only prove blissful to *him* who through faith has become one with Christ. Here the argument is, "Does the head abandon its member, and not draw it after itself?" And herein is the apostolic declaration fulfilled, "Christ, the risen Saviour, has become the *first-fruits* of them that sleep." "*Christ the first-fruits, afterwards they that are Christ's.*"

We are all hastening onward to that time when it will be said of us too, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee!" How truly are we to be pitied, if we do not *then* have Him with us, whom the "more than five hundred" saw face to face, and who caused all their nights, not excepting even *the last one*, to shine as bright as day. Without *Him*, in the shadows of the dark valley we shall be exposed to questions exciting horror and despair, like flashes of forked lightning: "Whither am I going, now that the poor dream of my short earthly existence has come to an end? Shall I live? or am I threatened with annihilation? If the former, how shall I stand at the last great day? How shall I justify myself for a life spent in utter alienation from God, and frittered away on the merest trifles? And how can I vindicate the humblest claim to the favour of the righteous Judge, holding the scales of justice, and to the bliss of those who surround His throne above?" Questions these that will make a man shudder, and to which the wisdom of this world, even from the height of its pretended sapience, can only reply by evasive modes of expression, or by profound impotent silence! But as soon as He who has robbed death of its power appears before the eye of our faith, as a well-



known friend, those dark and agonising problems are *all* solved in the most glorious manner. In Him we see the Surety, who, by His going before, has given us absolutely a guarantee that *death* is only a *change*, and that *to die* is merely *to fall asleep*. In Him we see the Lamb who bore and expiated our sins; and in the act of His resuscitation from the dead in our stead, we see Him divinely acquitted and justified of all our guilt. In Him we trust, as the all-prevailing Intercessor and Advocate, who in His own righteousness, wrought on our behalf, appears in our stead before the Father, who pronounces the final sentence. In Him we embrace the royal Friend, who is empowered to introduce His beloved ones, as His own peculiar inheritance, into the paradise of heaven, however poor, unworthy, and sinful they may be. And what do we need more? Nothing remains for us but to triumph with the apostle, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Let us render thanks unto the Lord of lords, for that He has settled the saving truth, which we should receive with our whole heart, on firm foundations, which leave no sort of exculpatory pretext to those who still do not believe. For a man to reject the gospel against himself, is, in fact, now nothing else than to oppose to that confirmation of it which the Eternal has a hundred times given to it, a silly or demoniacal denial. Let us, moreover, be assured, that when the final injunction shall be addressed to us, "*Set thy house in order*," we shall find all doors bolted and barred against us, provided He remain a stranger to us who bears the keys, not only of death and hell, but also of paradise and of the throne of God. May He then become to us also "the Cap-



tain of our salvation," and may He lead us, as His children, to glory, and may He graciously hear us when we prayerfully sing—

"O risen Lord ! O conquering King !  
O Life of all that live !  
To-day that peace of Easter bring,  
Which only Thou canst give !  
Once death, our foe,  
Had laid Thee low ;  
Now hast Thou rent his bonds in twain,  
For Thou art risen who once wast slain !

"Yes, let us truly know within  
Thy rising from the dead,  
And quit the grave of death and sin,  
And keep that gift, our Head,  
That Thou didst leave  
For all who cleave  
To Thee through all this earthly strife ;—  
So shall we enter into life."

*J. H. Böhmer, 1706.—Lyra Germanica.*



## XIV.

## THE RISEN SAVIOUR AND JAMES.

IN Psalm cxviii. the royal singer praises the Lord for the benefits conferred, and especially for victories granted him. But it cannot escape even the superficial reader that the psalm not only admits of, but demands an interpretation which extends far beyond the immediate cause of its composition, and which stamps it, at the same time, as a prophetic lyric. We can appeal to the very highest authority to justify this view of the psalm, since Christ himself expounds it as being a prophecy of Himself, and of His life on earth. In Matt. xxi. 42, Christ says : "*Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner : this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?*" In these words we recognise the 22d and 23d verses of our psalm. And when the people, rejoicing, and scattering palm branches, accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem, with the acclamation of the 26th verse of this psalm, "*Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord,*" the circumstance clearly proves that its Messianic signification was undoubtedly received by the Jews.

It is difficult to say to what extent, and how clearly, the holy psalmist himself was conscious of this meaning of the inspired effusion of his heart. But assuredly it cannot have escaped him that the Holy Spirit's influences were upon



him when this effusion flowed from his heart, and gave his words that prophetic form which he, the singer, himself had not designed. Resurrection-music pervades the psalm. In David's victories are celebrated, in types of much smaller proportions, the glorious triumph over the world, sin, death, and hell, achieved by the future branch of the house of David.

In those forty days during which the Saviour still remained on earth, and revealed Himself, now here, now there, to His own, the prophetic details of the psalm, from the 15th to the 17th verse, were fulfilled. "The voice of rejoicing and salvation was then heard in the tabernacles of the righteous" to this effect: "The right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly." . . . "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord." We have listened to varied utterances of this forty days' rejoicing in the resurrection, and have heartily united in it. We are now about to approach the house of a "righteous" man, from whom the resurrection elicited but a monosyllable; but his feelings were deep, and his interest in it intense.

1 CORINTHIANS xv. 7.

"After that he was seen of James."

A fresh manifestation of our risen Saviour is thus briefly noticed without illustrative comment; but it is, nevertheless, of the greatest interest and importance to us. And it is so of and for itself alone; for the greater the amount of testimony the better! It is, moreover, interesting with reference to the person to whom it was vouchsafed. Let us first become better acquainted with him; and then let us consider more closely the manifestation which was granted to this highly-favoured disciple; and, lastly, let us contemplate the fruit which it bore. May the Spirit of the Lord guide us to-day again unto all truth, and crown our hearing and our teaching with His lasting blessing!



I. The person who is now about to engage our attention is James, surnamed "the less." He must not be confounded with James the elder, brother of the apostle John, and son of the excellent Zebedee, the fisherman of the sea of Galilee, and of his wife Salome, that earnest, noble-hearted, and willingly self-denying follower of our Lord. This latter—one of the two apostles whom our Lord once called the "sons of thunder," not as a term of shame and reproach, but in reference to their fiery, impetuous, and determined nature, and to their energetic, aspiring characters—was, according to Matt. iv. 21, early called to leave his nets and follow Jesus; and he, together with his brother John and Simon Peter, were by Him honoured with truly extraordinary confidence. Subsequently set apart as an apostle, he, as it appears from Matt. x., was in constant attendance on our Lord, and was not only an eye-witness of the transfiguration on Mount Tabor, but likewise of His passion in the garden of Gethsemane. And to our Lord's question, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" he, together with his brother John, immediately, and with manly determination, replied, "Yea, Lord, we are able." And, for his part, he performed all he engaged to do; for he was the first of all the apostles who sealed his confession with his blood. Conspicuous among the leaders of the young Church, and acting as head of the congregation at Jerusalem, he drew down upon himself the especial hatred and wrath of King Herod Agrippa. When, A.D. 44, a bloody persecution broke out against the Christians, James was seized, and, as we are informed in Acts xii., was sentenced to death by the sword. He walked resolutely to the block, considering it a high favour and honour to be the first of the apostles to finish his course decorated with a martyr's crown. A tradition which we meet with in the



second century relates the following: When the accuser of our disciple saw him approach the bloody scaffold with heroic composure, nay, with joy, he suddenly, and with deep emotion, broke out into the exclamation, "I also believe on the Son of the living God, and confess Him! I also am a Christian." And when he also, in consequence of this his undaunted confession, had been likewise sentenced to death, and was being led with James to the place of execution, he earnestly implored the apostle's forgiveness, who not only granted it, but sealed it also with a kiss of brotherhood, adding cordially, "Peace be with thee, my brother."

We must then distinguish this James the son of Zebedee from him whom the apostle refers to in our text. This latter, "the less," who was early honoured with the name of "the just," was the son of Alphæus, and has been called the brother of Jesus. We are told in John viii. 5, concerning the brothers, *i.e.*, the cousins of Jesus, that they had not believed on Him. But we are by no means, however, to receive this as a proof of decided *unbelief*, but merely as shewing a deficiency in enlightened and perfect faith. If they had not recognised, in their great relative, at least a prophet endowed by God with superhuman power, why should they have pressed Him so violently, during the time of their so-called unbelief, to join Himself to that procession of pilgrims who were journeying to the Feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem, and thus at length to lift the veil and disclose His glory, that all the world might see His works, and no longer withhold the homage which was His due? But it was long before they could pay Him that honour which was due to Him as the Son of the living God, and the promised Saviour of the world; and this was their great difficulty—they had seen Him growing up from childhood among them, in every respect so purely human, though entirely free from sin. Our Lord's declaration, "A prophet



is not without honour save in his own country," appears enigmatical, but it is amply verified in every-day experience. Under like circumstances we should probably have acted precisely in the same manner as did these members of the family amongst whom Jesus grew up.

We first make the personal acquaintance of the apostle James in the Acts of the Apostles. The evangelists merely mention his name. Thus much, however, we do know of him at an early period, that he was, "as touching the law, blameless;" and that he was an earnest, pious Jew, who had even taken upon himself the vow of a Nazarene, which was stringently ascetic, and persistent in renunciation of the world, whence he early received from the people the honoured title of the "Just." But precisely this his Old Testament legal piety would render it especially difficult for him to recognise in Jesus, who, instead of preaching up the commandments, spoke but of pardon and liberty, the expected Messiah, since He so little resembled the lawgiver of Sinai, and instead of the law, preached only grace and freedom. But it must have been considered as likely to promote the kingdom of God greatly if this serious, earnest man, whose character was so stable, and whose whole soul seemed devoted to God, should be won over to the banner of the cross. This desired revolution doubtless was being brought about in the disciple whilst Jesus lived upon earth. Probably, however, he did not decide for the Lord until after His resurrection, and not until the moment which Paul has chronicled in the words of our text.

II. The risen Saviour appeared also to him. How, when, and where, we are not told. Doubtless it happened in Galilee, and at a moment when the disciple was alone. It must have been a great and important moment when James saw Him who had been slain upon the cross suddenly standing alive before him, in the splendour of His superhuman glory.



The first impression which this unexpected appearance made upon him was probably one rather of tumultuous astonishment and confusion than of pure joy ; but when he heard our Lord's voice addressed to him, his eyes were quickly opened. The straitened coat of mail, made of legal meshes interwoven, which had all too tightly compressed his heart, began to loosen, and heart and tongue, liberated, were free to confess, "Yes, Thou art He for whom my restless soul has, though unwittingly, ah, how long ! been pining." James was not a man of easily excitable temperament, but first deliberated, with intelligent and sustained thought, what principles he should adopt. But then, however, they took root all the more firmly and deeply in his soul, and anything which should afterwards have to displace them must indeed be strong and mighty. It would seem that in James a long time was needed before the *Jew* yielded to the *Christian*—to the child of the *new covenant*. Nevertheless, the leaven of the gospel at length permeated his austere nature to its very depths. This peculiarity of disposition, however, was not incompatible with the fact of his carriage and bearing being essentially that of an Israelite, stamped with a nobility and a tone which advantageously distinguished him from the other apostles. His reverential awe in contemplation of the infinite holiness of God and His commands, together with his childlike confidence in our Lord, were in him most marked, and formed the peculiar fundamental features of his spiritual character. He was, therefore, the very man to form, as it were, a bridge for his brethren according to the flesh to pass over from Judaism to Christianity, especially since he saw in the latter the ripe heavenly fruit in which the promising bloom of the former had resulted. In the same manner, no other at a later period would have been more competent than he to prevent the already threatening rupture between the Jewish and the Gentile Christians, and



to maintain peace in the Church of Christ between those two contending parties. And it is evident that he was specially selected by our Lord for this purpose; and it is no marvel that we see him occupy the place of his namesake who had been beheaded, and become a most distinguished leader, nay, the bulwark, or, as Paul calls him, the "pillar" of the Christian churches of Jewish proselytes in Palestine. Simon Peter foresaw this future conspicuous position of the son of Alphæus, as recorded in Acts xii., where we find him prisoner together with James, the son of Zebedee; for when, after James's execution, Peter was miraculously delivered from his danger by an angel, he then charged his fellow-disciples, saying, "Go shew these things unto James," (viz., to James the Less.) "and to the brethren." In Acts xv., where, at the solemn apostolic council, they are endeavouring to settle the contention which has already broken out between the Jewish and Gentile Christians, and to adjust the dissension between the former, who were so bound by their legal conformity, and the latter, who insisted upon their evangelical liberty in matters of faith, James appears with Peter as the leader of the assembly, and he it is who, as principal speaker, settles the dispute by moving that neither circumcision nor the observation of any of the Levitical statutes should be enjoined upon the believers from among the Gentiles, but that their only burden should be the observance of the so-called laws of Noah,—that they should "abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication," (Acts xv. 29.) This advice and proposition, which were joyfully received by the Gentile Christian churches, were now also thoroughly approved by the Jewish Christians, and were, moreover, not founded on dogmatic views and principles, and had but a *moral* signification, aiming merely at the restoration of peace between the contending parties. We everywhere find James viewing all



matters of faith from the same standpoint as the apostle Paul; and if, now and then, Jewish Christians, asserting that belief in Christ did not release them from circumcision and the observance of the Levitical laws, appealed to James, they did so seriously misunderstanding James's character, which certainly was peculiarly *Jewish*, and likewise the special call which this apostle had received to aim at the conversion of Israel. James, therefore, in order to prevent this misinterpretation, protests in the strongest terms against it, and calls those teachers who had persuaded the churches that the apostles still urged the necessity of circumcision and the observance of the Levitical law, "men who subverted souls," (Acts xv. 24.)

It has been observed that there is scarce an indication to be found throughout the whole narrative of the apostle James's career, or in his discourses, of his ever having been honoured by our Lord with a personal manifestation of Himself. But if he had not really seen the risen Saviour in the flesh, how came it to pass that he who was once so true a disciple of Moses, cast, as it were, in the mould of legality, should have advanced such lengths in New Testament freedom? and how came we to see him invested with the greatest authority, and even considered as a pillar of the Church of Christ by the college of the apostles? It is true that he never expressly mentions the appearance which had been vouchsafed to him, neither does he specially allude to our Lord's resurrection. Speaking of himself, in his epistle addressed to the Jewish proselytes, he styles himself, "*a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ*," and characterises the Christian faith as "the faith of Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory;" he speaks of "*the return of the Lord to judge the world*," and likewise of "*the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him*." May we not, in these few expressions, still see the full reflection of the glo-



rious rays which beamed on him at that ever-memorable moment when he heard, who shall say with what ecstasy, the words, "Peace be with you!" addressed to him by the Victor over the world, death, and hell? The scope and design of his epistle gave him no opportunity of referring to Christ's resurrection and His mediatorial work. The dispersed Jewish Christians, to whom the epistle is more immediately addressed, did not so much need dogmatic as practical moral instruction and advice. They were in danger of disassociating faith from the life, whereas the indispensable sign of true and saving faith is, that it should penetrate the *whole life*, renewing, sanctifying, and glorifying it. Where it does not effect this, it is a shadow of faith, and not the thing itself. This is what the apostle emphatically represents to the churches, as in the passage (James ii. 24) where he writes, "*Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only;*" and so it happens that occasionally he seems on the verge of contradicting *the doctrine of justification*, as it is set forth in the other parts of Scripture, and especially in St Paul's writings. But from more than one passage in his epistle, we sufficiently perceive how far James was from wishing to deny this doctrine, or even to weaken or invalidate it. It is most apparent, *e.g.*, that in chap. ii. 23, he most decidedly testifies that the *faith* of Abraham was imputed to him for righteousness, and because of his *faith* alone was he called "the friend of God." And just as unmistakably is he speaking in the 24th verse only in vindication of faith, *i.e.*, of the justification of the man declared righteous by God; not only *before God*, but *before men*, and *in the facts of his personal history*; and *this* justification is undoubtedly only attained by *works*, *i.e.*, by a *holy life* and a blameless course.

In what degree James had really experienced the power of the resurrection of Christ his end shews; of which we



are indeed not informed by the Holy Scriptures, but by the Jewish historian, Josephus, who was a contemporary of our apostle, and by Hegesippus, who died in the year 180 A.D. According to this latter, James, who is here also called "the Just," after he had, in a most self-denying manner, devoted his whole life to the difficult work of the conversion of his countrymen, was seized by the High Priest, Ananias; and then, at the urgent demand of the enemies of Christ who were assembled at the passover, he was set on the pinnacle of the temple, and there challenged to declare explicitly, and in the presence of the multitude assembled below, his belief concerning the person and works of Jesus. The apostle, without hesitating for one moment as to what was the right thing to do, cried with a powerful voice to the surging mob below, and quite within their hearing, "I am asked about the Son of man. He is now sitting in heaven, at the right hand of the Majesty on high, whence He will come again in the clouds!" Hardly had this bold and faithful testimony been uttered, however, when the multitude below burst forth in loud homage, crying, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" On the other hand, the Scribes and Pharisees exclaimed, "You see that even 'the Just' is entangled in the blasphemous delusion;" and hastening with their assistants up to the pinnacle of the temple, they hurled the faithful witness down from the dizzy height above upon the pavement below. Here they stoned him; and his death-blow was given with a club. The more thoughtful saw in this murder the culminating guilt of the Jews, and augured evil consequences. In fact, the accumulated iniquities of this stiff-necked, obstinate race were full to overflowing. The last attempt of saving love, in the faithful efforts of one of the noblest sons of Israel, was thus wickedly repulsed by this people, and rendered fruitless by their obstinacy. The scourge of Divine justice was now exercised upon them.



Judgments were launched against them. But a few years later, Jerusalem was a heap of stones and ashes, and the degenerate seed of Jacob was scattered like chaff by the four winds of heaven.

Such a one then was our James—a Christian to the inmost soul, only with a preponderating ethical basis,—a preacher of the old immutable law, written, however, in the heart by the spirit of love, and thus constituted the *law of liberty*. He stood in somewhat the same relation to Paul as Melancthon did to Luther; to the apostle John as did Calvin, who organised and arranged the scheme of Christian Institutes, to Luther, the man of fervid soul; for Calvin's character, like that of James, was stamped with the gravity and severity of the old covenant. "Manifold, and yet one," is the device of the kingdom of God on earth.

"Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." This is the theme and the pervading fundamental thought which runs through the apostle James's ministry, which therefore takes a supplementary part in the chorus of the apostolic voices. Whilst other apostolic epistles have especially aimed at shewing how, out of the natural tree, the dead and degenerate one to which we originally belong, a good one, well pleasing to God, may grow, James brings its fruits to view, which will tend to justify the good tree in the eyes of the world. But James knows no other *root* of the good tree but living, earnest faith in "Christ, who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification." Thus the unity and the perfect harmony of the apostolic writings are placed beyond all doubt, and characterise all Scripture.

"Thy word, O Lord, like gentle dews,  
Falls soft on hearts that pine;  
Lord, to Thy garden ne'er refuse  
This heavenly balm of Thine.



Water'd from Thee,  
Let every tree  
Bud forth and blossom to Thy praise,  
And bear much fruit in after days.

“Thy word is like a flaming sword,  
A wedge that cleaveth stone;  
Keen as a fire, so burns Thy word,  
And pierceth flesh and bone.  
Oh! send it forth,  
O'er all the earth,  
To shatter all the might of sin,  
The darken'd heart to cleanse and win!

“Thy word, a wondrous guiding star,  
On pilgrim hearts doth rise;  
Leads to their Lord who dwell afar,  
And makes the simple wise.  
Let not its light  
E'er sink in night,  
But still in every spirit shine,  
That none may miss Thy light divine.”

*Lyra Germanica.*



## XV.

## THE APPEARANCE ON THE MOUNTAIN.

WE read in the history of our country of commanders of fortresses who, after being challenged by the besiegers to surrender, because their king had been totally defeated, and had lost his kingdom, have remained courageously on their bastions, and replied to the enemy, "For the time being we are kings in this fortress: take the town, if you can." But it was long before they could take it. Let us behave like those generals, for in our day there are those who urgently press on us to surrender the strong fortress of biblical Christianity, since it has been undermined and untenable by the great advance of science. Let us not be terrified by them, but answer them with all calmness, "There is no danger yet!" Whoever shall assail the rock on which we stand, as any one may read in Matt. xxi. 44, "shall by it be ground to powder."

Yea, what shall I say? You, for instance, who would rob us of our belief in the divinity of Christ, have in your own hearts, were you but to look to it, the strongest evidences of the truth against which you strive. You deny Christ's superhuman power and sovereign authority, and lo, it makes itself felt at every moment in your own soul! Christ rules in your moral consciousness, which has become very different from that which you naturally inherited, and which, stamped with His image, remains indelibly impressed with it. He reigns in your conscience, rendered keen in its perceptions and



purified; and it often accuses you of things which your reason would endeavour to persuade you are innocent; and, though you may intensely desire to do so, you cannot succeed in silencing the judge that is within you. Christ rules over you, in that He binds you so closely to Christian morals that you cannot violate them without drawing down upon yourself the condemnation of your own heart, as well as that of public opinion. Yes, He exerts a sovereign influence over all your views of life, your aims, and your contemplations of death, eternity, and judgment. You find yourself unable to get fully rid of those ideas which have taken hold of you, and which are now indelibly impressed upon you. In the quiet hours of meditation they inevitably rise again in your consciousness, and they assuredly will do so when the last enemy knocks at your door. With heavy cares and anxieties in their train, they break through everything behind which you thought to have intrenched yourself, and mock at the free-thinking sophisms on which you had placed so much dependence.

It has often been seriously determined to root out and to do away with Christ, and all that He has established in the world,—the Church, Sunday, marriage, the domestic constitution, the “powers that be” as a divine institution, and many things beside. Vain endeavour! Within a short time did He, although a war of extermination had been declared against Him, raise up everything from its ruins, and the rebellious knaves were put in the pillory of public contempt. It has been attempted to undermine Christian morals, to emancipate and enthrone the flesh, to pronounce sin pure, which Christ’s law condemns, and to render virtues ridiculous, which He, with divine authority, commends and insists upon. But what has become of those who presumed to form such designs as these? They have come to shame with their abominable literature, and nothing remains for them but to



gnash their teeth in those dark places to which they have been driven back, and to exclaim, with the apostate emperor, "*Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!*" It has been planned to supersede the gospel by "Humanism," *i.e.*, the ideas of human reason. In His righteous anger the Lord allowed this attempt to be carried on for a long time. Then pride, selfishness, irreligion, and disobedience, these weeds grew up so rankly, that the exclamation has now for a long time been spreading, and is heard both in the Church, in the seats of learning, and in private houses, "Oh that Christ would but rule the world again! For who but He breaks down selfishness? Who instils piety and love, who plants the germs of all that is noble, good, and beautiful, but He alone?"

What great cause have we then to stand our ground, looking in faith to Christ, and to allow nothing in the world to perplex us concerning the gospel as the "power of God." The Easter scene, which, in the course of our meditations, we are about to approach, will yield us a fresh harvest of powerful calls and encouragements to do so. The Lord grant that they may be welcomed and entertained by us!

MATT. xxviii. 16-20.

"Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

The forty days are well-nigh spent, that delightful period in which possibly a faint type and reflected image is brought before us of that intercourse which the Lord purposes to vouchsafe to His people on earth during the thousand years in which Satan will be bound, when He will manifest Himself



to them personally, appearing now here, now there, occasionally meeting them with his salutation of "Peace!" It is our Lord's *last* manifestation *but one* before His ascension which will now engage our attention, and incontestably likewise the most important and sublime of all, rendered so by the didactic and preceptive address which He then delivered. I do not doubt but that you will follow me with joy to the scene, especially in these dark, tumultuous, and eventful days, when in the uproar of the wildest party struggles, and in the revolutions of one nation after another, the world is almost beginning to faint for fear of the things which shall come to pass, and even to believers the question occurs most oppressively, for it is not concealed from them that "Satan is very wroth," and is preparing for the last decisive struggle for dominion over the world. Who shall be master of the future? Shall Satan, the prince of darkness, or Christ, the Lord of glory? In the Gospel before us we receive the decisive and conclusive answer to this question, involving so much solicitude. Here *He* stands before us, to whom undoubtedly, after all the tumult and confusion, the crown will devolve, as His everlasting inheritance; and by whom would you rather that it should be worn in heaven and on earth, than by Him? May the announcement descending from heaven soon resound through the earth, "I have set my king upon my holy hill!"

Our Gospel renders us a threefold valuable service. In the first place, it sets *the person of Jesus clearly forth before us*; secondly, *it discloses to us the world's future*; and, lastly, *it enlightens our present darkness*. Let us convince ourselves more thoroughly of these things, and may the Lord grant us a rich draught of refreshment and encouragement from the well of consolation which here springs up again for us irrepressibly and inexhaustibly!

I. The scene of the transaction under our consideration was a solitary mountain-top in Galilee; and our Lord's



manifestation there must neither be confounded with that which took place, immediately before His ascension, on the Mount of Olives, nor with that we have already considered, which was vouchsafed to more than five hundred brethren at once in Galilee. It occurred after the latter, and before the former, and I do not doubt but that the apostle had this one in view in the passage contained in 1 Cor. xv. 7, "After that, he was seen of all the apostles." Our Lord had expressly directed His apostles to meet Him at this particular place, and we may well imagine with what high expectations they were assembled there; and lo! suddenly, our Lord stood again before them, radiant with all His triumphal glory, seeing which they immediately fall down and worship Him. But how runs the narrative? "Some," we read, "doubted." This seems strange; it is, however, but another proof of the truth of the evangelical report. No mythical fancy would ever have suggested the recurrence of uncertainty and doubt to the apostles, when they had already seen the risen Saviour so many times, neither would it have marred the picture by the contradiction of simultaneous worship and doubt. But the evangelist tells us plainly and simply, like a chronicler from his personal observation, what had occurred, and is hence quite unconcerned as to whether his narrative appear contradictory or not. But is there not really a contradiction here? Undoubtedly; but such a one as frequently meets us in real life, and as often transpires in our own souls, as, for instance, when we feel constrained to exclaim with the afflicted father of the tormented child, "*Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief;*" or even to join in the words of Job, "If I had called, and he had answered me; yet would I not believe that he had hearkened unto my voice." There appears to be no reason why the passage should not be understood in this sense, that *those* of the eleven who doubted, did so because they hesitated as to



whether they really saw a glorified form presented to their eyes, or whether they themselves were but dreaming. But the question might for a moment flash through their minds, whether He really were their Lord and Master, since the mode of His manifestation to them was with the rapidity of lightning, and whether He were not possibly a phantom, an angelic being from the invisible world; and so much the more readily might they do so since we have reason to know that the manifestation of the Prince of life was more perfectly divested of all that is earthly, in proportion as the time drew nearer for Him to return; His form became more spiritualised, and of greater splendour. But our Lord hastens to free those from their foolish ideas who were alarmingly surprised at the spirit-like mode in which He presented Himself before them. With His wonted condescension, He commands those who were prostrate in the dust to rise, and He speaks to them in order to raise the veil which had hitherto concealed from them His person and His superhuman dignity and majesty. Before He departed from them, they were to have their last doubt removed in reference to Him in whom they had trusted and now placed their confidence. On this head, my brethren, we likewise must be perfectly clear. All our peace depends upon it. Christianity is not mere doctrine, but the practical realisation of the work of redemption. It is the history of the divine scheme of man's salvation, and as such, wholly depends on the person of the Saviour. Its truth hinges upon His having been the right and qualified man, born to achieve the great work, which He, *as such*, fully accomplished. Well do I know the strange point of view taken by numbers of our contemporaries, who would not soil their lips with the assertion that Christ was nothing more than a mere man; who nevertheless endeavour, with extraordinary shyness, to evade the question that continually



presses upon them, Who then was He? It is as if they had not the courage to look straight at the inevitable consequence of their protests against an unbelief which, with reference to the person of Christ, refuses to recognise Him as being more than man, or to allow their vacillating and irresolute conception of the person of Christ to be moulded and consummated in the acknowledgment, that if He be of a higher order than mortal man descended of Adam, and not an angel, but the Lord and ruler of angels, then He can have been no other than God himself, the only-begotten and essential Son of the everlasting Father. But they shrink back from this representation as though it involved the suggestion of some most audacious proposition. They get a distant peep into the Christian paradise, where they see the tree of life in all its splendour, but never enjoy its fruits. They think that whatever is contradictory to reason may never be appropriated. But what is there contradictory to reason in this great mystery, which indeed surpasses the range of human comprehension, that the all-sufficient and inscrutable God should, before the foundation of the world, without prejudice to His own fulness, have shared His Divine glory with *another* "I myself," begotten *of Himself*, who became *Himself* objectively? what is there inconceivable in the "mystery of godliness," that *that* Son of God, existing prior to creation, should become man in the person of Christ, since this miraculous way appears to be the only one by which the salvation of the human race from eternal ruin was possible?

But let us listen to Him who came down *Himself* from heaven to us. He will not pass through our midst as a Being of a questionable nature, but wills that we should see Him in definite and distinct outline and form. He who views His person with but indistinct impressions, will likewise have but fluctuating ideas as to his soul's welfare and bliss without



really attaining them. He who through indecision and indistinctness of apprehension has but confidence to exclaim, "O Thou glorious Being! O Thou superhuman Being! O Thou ineffable Being!" and does not boldly come to the decision of Thomas, when he cried, "My Lord and my God!" will likewise never inherit the blessing of Thomas. But hear how He himself prepares the way for this heroic faith: "*All power,*" says He, "*is given unto me in heaven and on earth.*" What do you say to this declaration? Does it involve less than the proclamation issued just before the enthronement of the King of kings and the sovereign mandate, that before His Majesty "every knee should bow, of things in heaven and of things on earth?" Were it but less decided, and to the effect, "*Power is given unto me,*" or even "All power on earth," His declaration would have admitted of a weakened interpretation, and could have restricted its import with reference to the spiritual influence which Christ would exercise by His teaching. Now, however, there is no opportunity given for a subtilised and meagre construction. This passage stands like a rock, against which all assaults upon the divinity of Christ must founder. Like a hurricane, it prostrates all the Babel towers of doubts and contradictions. Unbelief might indeed desire to intrench itself behind the question, whether this important testimony really proceeded from the lips of Jesus. But is it only to be found there, alone and isolated? Has not our Lord virtually said the *same thing* in many other places? Did He not say, in Matt. xi. 27, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father?" Does He not, in His prayer as High Priest, testify that the Father had given Him power *over all flesh*? (John xvii. 2.) And does He express anything less than this, when He claims *the same honour for Himself* that is due to the Father, which He has done repeatedly, and enumerates the final resurrection, the holding of the last judgment, the award fixing the



eternal destiny of mortals, and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth, as included amongst His offices and kingly prerogatives? But He nowhere testified so directly, so expressly, and so plainly, whom He desired Himself to be considered, as in the farewell salutation to His apostles, in which we hear Him say, "*All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth.*" It is true that He says, "is given to me," and by this He means that it is as acknowledged to be His, as the Son of man, after He had carried out for us the great work of mediation. Not until then could *all* power be given Him. He was invested, as King of Peace, with absolute power, and it was covenanted, in connexion with His propitiation, that He should be so. He did not possess it until He had fulfilled this work; not until then could He bind Satan, extend the limits of His kingdom from pole to pole, or blow with the creative breath of His reviving Spirit upon "the dry bones" of humanity, dispensing grace, and opening heaven to poor sinners, where Moses most righteously condemned. He can now act most freely. Eternal justice nowhere obstructs His path. He exercises joint authority with His Father, and the goal of universal history is the world's subjection to His sceptre of peace.

What must the eleven have experienced when this grand announcement from the lips of their risen Lord sounded in their ears? The declaration must ever have remained present to their minds. We find the whole apostolic Church upon their knees before Jesus. The question whether Christ be to be worshipped or not was never mooted until modern times, until these days of weak faith and morbid doubts. Throughout all ages His Church had considered this a matter of course. The eleven, whom you see bow before Him yonder on the Galilean mountains, formed the first link of that chain of worshippers which has uninterruptedly extended through eighteen centuries down to the present day, and



amongst them you will find the best, the most enlightened, and the noblest of every age. Of this chain, which loses itself in the cloud of witnesses of whom the world was not worthy, strive ye also to be links. May that which you see but darkly, and that which you believe but imperfectly, by the warrant of the testimony now brought before you, be confirmed in clear, manly, and fixed assurance. Acknowledge with the Jews that you are constrained to pass sentence of death upon Jesus as the worst of all blasphemers if you hesitate to bow the knee to Him as the co-equal Lord of heaven. The former you will not wish to do. Well, then, decide consistently to do the latter, and especially since in our time the most terrible spirits of darkness struggle for the dominion of the world. Heartily rejoice that "all power in heaven and on earth" is given to Him whose name is Immanuel, and who, in the passage of the Gospel before us, throws the veil entirely aside.

II. The *hope* of the world rests on this foundation—that *He* fills the throne of power. Did I not know this, I should doubt as to the world's future, notwithstanding my belief in the existence of a personal God. What other course of action remained open to God, holy and righteous, with reference to mankind perishing in sin and in audacious rebellion against Him and His sacred government, but to abandon them to their own ruinous courses, and to resign them to the dark spirit to which they had sold themselves to everlasting death? Now, however, I know that this night-clad earth, with its growth of thorns and thistles, is committed to *His* charge to whom the eternal Father has confided the great work of mediation between Himself and sinners; and now here below, in this curse-laden valley of death, He meets me, and says, "The Son of man came not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved;" whereupon, with the high priest Joshua, I defy him who



goeth about as a roaring lion, and say, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan! even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem," (Zech. iii. 2.) Now, comforted in spirit, I steer my little bark of hope through all the hellish noise and tumult of the dark abyss which at present encompasses me, and in spirit anchor on the shores of a future whose bright and peaceful splendour far transcends the glory of the lost paradise.

A royal commission is issued by our risen Lord, following upon this proclamation of His majesty. Hear Him! Therefore, (because all power is given to me,) "*go ye into all the world, and teach* [literally, make scholars and disciples of] *all nations, baptizing them* [in the original, whilst ye baptize them] *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*" The commission is, indeed, concise; but one more kinglike or more grand was never heard on earth. What commanding confidence breathes in these words! What certainty of victory is disclosed by them! They contain the governmental programme of the Prince of the kings of the earth—one wholly worthy of Him and peculiarly His own. Do but consider who they were whom He thus addressed. There stand the poor, illiterate men, bred in poverty, and destitute of all worldly tact; these are they to whom He exhibits the wide, wide world, with its millions lapsed to the powers of darkness, whom He charges them to conquer for Him. What a commission! And who will doubt that He seriously purposed it? To Himself, indeed, the injunction appeared by no means so gigantic. How, otherwise, would His delivery have been so calm, so quiet? What unparalleled sublimity in the words, "Go ye!" They are equivalent to the word of command, "Forward!" when given on the battle-field; and how transparently do they disclose our Lord's self-consciousness! He intends not only to carry the banner Himself before His



agents, but likewise to wield the sword of the Spirit in their hands. They will conquer, because He will clothe them with His might, will arm and equip them with His strength. And have they not triumphed in point of fact? At our Lord's word these weak and despicable witnesses went forth. Before them lay Greece, intoxicated with the idolatry of the creature, and entangled in the enchantment of material and sensuous beauty; before them was Rome, in all its insolence of wide-spread dominion and self-applauding culture; before them was Egypt, which, by its all-powerful priestly castes, seemed apparently ensnared for ever in the worship of nature; and before them were how many lands beside, still wrapped in blackest darkness, to which they were now directed! But they went; and how long was it before the idols of the world everywhere bowed themselves before the crucified God whom these messengers proclaimed, as Dagon once did before the ark of the covenant? and ere long, the banner of the cross, though regarded by the world as the most contemptible it had ever known, waved as a triumphant standard from the pinnacles of the proudest pagodas and of world-renowned halls of philosophy.

We shall refrain from a more particular exposition of our Lord's sublime charge to His disciples, and not entering on the deeper signification of baptism, shall consider it merely as the mode of initiation into Christ's Church; we shall content ourselves with taking the passage, in its most general sense, as a divine commission for the spiritual conquest of the world. And we shall find the world's future fully disclosed with prospects the most consolatory. The foundation of an empire of peace which shall embrace the whole world is involved in His plan, whilst all power is His too; hence the establishment of this kingdom must necessarily come to pass, oppose it what may. He will not have engaged in this hot warfare with the world in vain. It shall be transformed



into a mirror of the Almighty's splendour, into an Eden in which "mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other." It shall come to pass that everything that hath breath shall bow to Immanuel's sceptre ; and that kings shall cast down their crowns at His feet ; that selfishness shall everywhere give place to pure love, and all government shall proceed from Zion ; nay, that after Satan has been bound in the pit, the whole human race shall become *one* fold under *one* Shepherd, and every house shall be formed into "*a tabernacle of God with men.*" This is the "*new earth*" of which we hear the Lord say, by the prophet Isaiah, lxvi. 22, it "*shall remain* before me." This is the everlasting Jerusalem which shall come down from heaven to earth. The sublime injunction, "*Go ye,*" still resounds. Nay, it is now heard throughout the earth more loudly than heretofore. And He who gives the word of command knows assuredly that the Father will put all His enemies under His feet, and that the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.

III. But when will this happen? The Father hath put the "hour" in His own power, (Acts i. 7.) And when that is come our Lord will "speedily" accomplish all that remains to be done. Can you still ignore that He, to whom all power is given, is now already every day at His work? Have you run in the wrong direction with your eyes fixed on some dark corner, unconscious of what was going on behind you? Do not the triumphant shouts of His heralds and standard-bearers already reach your ear from distant heathen lands? Is it not even now a great fact that at this moment there are more than six thousand witnesses baptized with the Spirit of Christ, at twelve hundred different stations, who preach the doctrine of the cross to perishing Christless souls?—that nearly a million of converts who, some few decades since, lay in darkness and in the shadow of death, now join with us in worship at the feet of the Lamb?—that upon the



most moderate computation, some ten or twelve thousand souls are annually brought from amongst the heathen to our Lord, as fruits of the travail of His soul?—that the numbers of heathen children who are being educated in Christian schools, the seed-corn of a glorious future harvest, can scarce be numbered?—that large tracts of land and whole islands, which, but a short time since, were mantled with the blackest night of sin and delusion, now illumined by the light of Christianity, emerge from their darkness as lovely gardens of the Lord's own planting? And can you overlook the important events which are now transpiring in the very crown of the old father of lies, in India and in China? Have you not heard how the Lord, by varied instrumentality, is opening breaches, digging trenches, cutting roads, in order to make a way for that kingdom which, with the still small voice, shall follow the storm, the earthquake, and the fire that preceded it? The immediate circle by which we are surrounded offers us, indeed, far less cause for consolation. It rather seems as if everything connected with the kingdom of God were with us receding. At least there is much which might tempt us to be perplexed with the testimony, "*All power is given unto me.*" But if we look into things more closely, we shall not fail to discover, even in the chaotic commotion in which we live, the heavenly Architect, and shall find, now here, now there, the bright traces of His ceaseless energy. And how should it even be possible for Him to leave us, since He once for all has unequivocally assured all His people, however few their number, "*that the little flock should not fear; for it is their Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom;*" and who likewise said and still says, "*Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world!*"

How much there is occurring precisely at this time which is obviously clearing the way for the triumph of the Lord Jesus and His gospel amongst us. How palpably is it de-



monstrated, and that in the most varied modes, that positive evangelical Christianity is the sole pillar upon which both law and order in society rest; and most certainly not upon negative Christianity and pretended illumination, which are already condemned by their fruits. The longer we reflect upon it, the clearer is it, that all education which excludes the gospel, however it may glitter, is but illusory and hollow, and that there is but a step from it to barbarism; that revolt from Christ, as at present in vogue amongst us, inevitably involves nothing less than the gradual decay and ruin of all true, moral consciousness; that the nations of the earth can only escape the abyss of social and moral ruin by following that path which shall restore them to the banner of Immanuel; that he who looses his grasp of revealed truth must inevitably fall into that enchanted circle in which he can no longer distinguish good from evil; that he who once oversteps the limits of the gospel falls into a sphere where nothing is left for him but belief not only in blind chance, but, likewise in the annihilation of man's identity in death, and consequent utter hopelessness and despair. These are disclosures for which we are indebted to the present day, and which are no longer to be concealed from the most obtuse, the most prejudiced, and the most malevolent. And shall we, out of consideration for them, be precluded from asserting that the Lord has since interfered, as He previously did in the beginning of the plan, and that He even now is organising in our midst preparations whereby to glorify His name afresh? And consequent upon this conviction, and irrespective of much that is encouraging at this juncture as to the Church and theology, does it not seem that the midnight gloom of the present time is about to be suddenly irradiated, and that in the most auspicious manner?

But that the Lord, faithful to His promise, really is with



His own people "daily," you who are His may prove by the plainest vouchers drawn from your own personal experiences. Tell the unbelieving world, then, of the answers to prayer which you have experienced, of the aids and deliverances which continually challenge your surprise ; of the comfort and peace which the Lord has breathed into your heart in times of distress, and of the powers of the world to come, with which He then refreshed you. Shew the unwilling sceptic how He cheers you with hope, with patience in affliction, and that it is your faith which gives you the victory over the world. At the same time tell them of your friends, who have already shaken off the dust of their pilgrimage, and have departed this life not only peacefully, but even triumphantly, that it may be known by all, that He not only is with His own people, but that He remains with them unto the end. Your diary is the best certificate of the truth of His great word of promise. Even though the whole world around you deny that Christ is risen, and ascended into heaven, that "*He might fulfil all things*," you remain firm ; He is your own ; and no critic, no sophist shall be able to rob you of Him ; for your "*daily experience*" is your evidence.

Since, then, the Lord Jesus Christ really is that which He has declared Himself to be in the sublime announcement upon which we now have meditated, why do we still hesitate to bow the knee to Him, and to devote body and soul to His service ? He has all power to *condemn* as well as to *save*, to exile to hell as well as to open the portals of bliss. But His heart is inclined to bless, and to gladden. Let us yield to His gentle yoke, and become Christians indeed, whose Christianity is not merely a Sunday dress, or holiday suit, but their inmost, deepest life ; something possessed just as the continuous silent functions of respiration and circulation, never belying itself even in the most insignificant



actions or utterances ; so that the Christian is always a Christian whether asleep or awake, in rest or in action, whether silent or speaking, and ever diffuses the fragrant odour of that Spirit with which he has been inspired from on high. Of such as these is the retinue which the King of kings wills to have around Him. They live, yet not they, but Christ lives in them. May creative grace grant that we may all become such Christians ! and to this end, let us never cease to repeat the prayer of the sacred lyricist :—

“Lo ! Thy presence filleth now  
All Thy church in every place,  
To my heart, oh, enter Thou ;  
See, it thirsteth for thy grace !  
Come, Thou King of glory, come,  
Deign to make my heart Thy home,  
There abide and rule alone,  
As upon Thy heavenly throne !

“Parting, do Thou bring Thy life,  
God, and heaven, most inly near,  
Let me rise o’er earthly strife,  
As though still I saw Thee here ;  
And my heart, transplanted hence,  
Strange to earth and time and sense,  
Dwell with Thee in heaven e’en now,  
**Where our only joy art Thou !**”

*Tersteegen.—Lyra Germanica.*



## XVI.

## THE ASCENSION.

WHAT a glorious festival is that of the ascension of our Lord, the crown of all our Church festivals! Its glory is reflected not only from the lives of the apostles, but from their whole appearance. How were they transformed by the miracle which they witnessed on the Mount of Olives! Henceforth they need nothing, though the earth refuse them all it has to offer. They calmly watch, in the flight of years, their rapidly-waning life, for they know well the shores to which their life's bark is bound. They pass erect through the storms and tempests of their pilgrimage; for, ere long, a sun will shine on them which no cloud shall ever dim, and which shall never set. They weep as though they wept not; for possibly the morrow may land them where the last tear shall be wiped away from their eyes. They possess as though they possessed not, for how valueless is all earthly good when compared with that which they call their own elsewhere! They go on their course free and cheerful, for who can rob them of their riches? Their souls are now detached from all that is subject to change. The treasures, which they really prize are inaccessible to every earthly foe. Their life is safe, for it is concealed and hidden with Christ in God. Nothing, nor any one, shall ever separate them from their friends again; for they know that their associations are eternal. It is not possible to disturb their peace,



for it no longer rests on a temporal basis. Their feet still traverse the valley of death; but in heart they walk in light the fields of immortality. Their bark of life may still rock to and fro on the surging waves, but the anchor is already cast in the harbour "within the veil." When overshadowed by the cloud of death's dark hour, they then only see Elijah's chariot, which they also soon will enter. And even the funeral bell seems to them merely an harmonious peal summoning them to a festival held near their much-loved home. Happy indeed are they! But how did they attain so enviable a position? Hear the answer to this question in Heb. vi. 19, 20, where one of these blest mortals speaks in the name of all: "*Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus.*" Do you understand? Their hope is founded on the *ascension of their Lord and Master*. We are now about to contemplate this great event attentively. "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground," (Ex. iii. 5.)

MARK xvi. 19; LUKE xxiv. 50 52; ACTS i. 9-11.

"And he led them out as far as Bethany; and after that he had spoken with them, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And he sat on the right hand of God. And they worshipped him. And, while they looked stedfastly towards heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. Then returned they, with great joy, unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath-day's journey."

These are the circumstances under which we stand with reference to the great event which has burst open the prison, secluded within which we were shut up to the beggarly scenes



of time, and which has transformed the gloomy gate of death into a sunny and radiantly-illuminated porch of glory. By it we who had been exiled from the Father's house are recalled home.

Let this heart-elevating point of view be that from which we may more closely examine it. We see, in the first place, *how our Lord in His ascension points to us the road to the far-off heavenly world; and then how HE, anticipating our arrival there, has taken possession of it for us.*

May He himself be near, and prepare the way for the reception into our heart of the most gladdening of all truths, the truth of the ascension !

I. The delightful period of the forty days is past. The eleven, at their Master's command, have returned from Galilee to Judea. We find them on the Mount of Olives, the spot which their Master had appointed for them to meet Him. Let us join them. Here a spectacle is about to be presented to us which promises unbounded satisfaction to one of our soul's most pressing wants. What will then be disclosed to us here? That land, my friends, about which we are ever ready to seek information. We desire first to learn the *direction* in which to look for it, and then, as much of its nature and constitution as we are able to comprehend while here on earth; and we desire, moreover, to be abundantly provided with all that may aid us to complete our pilgrimage, "*rejoicing in hope.*" With the heart touched by Christ, the heavenly magnet, there is no longer any true repose for us here on earth. We are from that moment impelled by a holy longing, which, ceasing from all that is sublunary and imperfect, presses forward to the perfect, and by it we are stimulated to cast anchor in a haven situate on other shores, irradiated by another sun than that of earth. We pilgrims and sojourners have indeed known hours of heavenly transport like those experienced on Tabor, in which



we might have exclaimed with Peter, "It is good for us to be here; let us here erect tabernacles!" These, however, are but hours; whilst we long for eternities. Yes, whilst here on earth, we may be esteemed happy, as those who are nursed in the lap of divine grace; but it is by faith alone that we here come to the knowledge that we are so securely sheltered. But we pant for *sight*. The consciousness that through Christ our sins have lost their damning power is to us a subject of intense delight. But sin itself cleaves to us, and impedes us whilst we would so fain live entirely to the Lord and to His glory. Much that is delightful is indeed offered to us here, in communion with the brethren, and in the fellowship of saints. But ah! there are hours of separation, and tears at parting, and, besides these, many misunderstandings here below, and the accursed strife of those who are agreed in matters of faith, but who fight for opinions, or even for mere matters of *form*! We pine for intercourse with the "just made perfect" in that light which neither sin, death, nor Satan shall be able to dim with their blended shadows. Yes, there is a something alive within us which, at one time with silent yearning, at another with passionate eagerness, seeks a land where the Lord no longer dwells in darkness—where the alternation of day and night has given place to a cheerful and eternal spring-like morning—where no grave-mound ever again shall indicate the melancholy termination of our happiest associations, nay, of all our joy in life,—where, on the contrary, the hand of eternal Love shall wipe the last sweat of conflict and tribulation from our brow, and shall dry the last tear from our eyes. Such is the land we seek and long for. Does it really exist? Where are we to look for it? Shall we ever reach it? And when, oh! when shall we anchor there?

You are not ignorant of the kindly manner in which our Lord entertained this earnest question of our heart. We



have His assurance that the land really exists. He has told us of that paternal home which is beyond this sphere, and which comprises many mansions. And He has consoled us with the prospect of a future blissful occupation of them. But the general intimation, that a home such as we desire is there awaiting us, is inadequate for us poor mortals. We long for more distinct views, for clearer and more definite conceptions of this future world. Fain, whilst in the body, would we in spirit settle there! Nothing but a thoroughly intelligible idea of that other country would meet our wishes. We long to gaze into it, and to be definitely informed not only in which direction the land lies, but likewise, especially, whether we are justified in thinking of life there as real and personal, and not as a mere absorption into an ocean of spiritual existence—as shadowy life without reminiscence or recognition, or without even self-consciousness. All these secret wishes of our heart are fully satisfied on the Mount of Olives, and this is the chief reason why we, with exultant hallelujahs, should welcome the Feast of the Ascension as a joyous festival of the first and highest importance.

Our risen Saviour has just met the circle of the eleven with His wonted greeting, "*Peace be with you!*" Even now, yonder He stands on the scene of His conflicts, of His tears. But the former are now terminated in most glorious victory, and the latter are for ever dried up. He has ere He leaves them still many important suggestions both of consolation and instruction for His disciples. He repeats His command, to remain together in Jerusalem awaiting the outpouring of the Holy Ghost according to the promise of the Father. At the same time He renews the great commission in compliance with which they are to go out into all the world, and, by teaching the nations, to gain them over to His banner, and by baptizing to incorporate them into His kingdom. After He has thus once more solemnly and finally declared to them



His last injunction, what occurs there? Like a High Priest, He spreads His hands over His chosen ones to bless them; and in this significant posture, all heavenly favour and grace beaming in His glorified countenance, He rises visibly before the eyes of His disciples, who are overwhelmed with adoring wonder, seeing Him soar from earth and advance with silent, noiseless majesty towards heaven. He is not carried up, as once Elijah was, in a chariot of fire; He is not, like Lazarus, borne up by angels' hands. As it became the dignity of the *Son of God*, He ascends by His own unassisted power. In adoring silence the disciples watch Him in His flight. They hardly know if they dare trust their eyes. They indeed knew before of another world, the dwelling of the blest; but its existence had never previously been brought home to them so closely, so really, so palpably, and so sublimely, as at this moment, when they see their Master bodily ascending thither. Never until now had the other world assumed to them a material form and a definite shape. And how fresh, how blooming and vigorous is the hope which now wakes up within them, how wonderfully near does that in an instant appear which had hitherto loomed but dimly and obscurely in the distance. It is almost to them as if they too were on their way to heaven, in attendance on their soaring Lord. And shall we not feel the same, when we see the Son of Man and Mediator ascend on high? Will not that be the first moment to us, likewise, in which the great fact of the other world will be personally realised? We are now convinced that heaven is a habitable and inhabited sphere, existing not only in the mirror of imagination, but also within the compass of realities,—no hazy region dissolving like a phantom into nothing at the approach of day, but a real territory which has its boundaries, and to which we journey just as we travel to any country of our own globe. The ascension of Christ *shews* us the direction in which we are to



seek that heavenly Canaan. It lies on the other side of yon azure sky, beyond that which we are wont to term the firmament, and the stars above us are but the outposts of the blessed land, if not indeed the stations on our homeward way. It is, therefore, not without reason that when praying we raise our eyes upwards—not without truth that in silent nights of sorrow we gaze upwards to the stars with ardent longings and intense desire as to the lights of our Father's home. Nay; the land of the blest presents itself in such reality, that had we wings to bear us as far as our soul's longings stretch, even we should also, like our Lord, wing our flight to it beyond the stars, leaving the dust of earth behind. You will say these representations of the other world are bold and daring; but we poor mortals need precisely such, successfully to combat the terrors of death, which likewise are by no means imaginary, but intensely real. And the visible ascension of Christ really proffers them to us. With thankful joy we appropriate them, and willingly leave spiritualism to others who, affecting a false superiority, subtilise and volatilise the heavenly world to such a degree that nothing remains of it but easily-dispersed mist and vapour.

“But are we, then, to accept the so-called ascension of Christ as an *historical* event?” Can you still doubt it? I do not indeed deny that there is a strong temptation to doubt. Without much effort, however, we can here come to the aid of wavering faith. Consider, in the first place, that the narrative is either historically related, by all the evangelists and apostles who were themselves eye-witnesses of the sublime event, or had heard it reported from the lips of credible and corroborated witnesses, or (as in the case of the apostle Paul) specially confirmed; or it is treated as being publicly known and acknowledged, and as such, raised above all contradiction. In the second place, do not omit to notice that the ascension of our Lord, no less than His resurrection



from the dead, had been repeatedly and most unequivocally foretold and prophesied by Himself, and for ages previously by the old prophets ; a circumstance which must conduce to bring the matter home to your belief. Reflect further, that the ascension of Christ ensues just as necessarily and naturally as the development of the flower when plant, stalk, leaf, and bud, are already in existence. Look at the connexion of His whole career, how He was sent down from His Father, in order, as God-man, to fulfil His work of mediation and redemption ; how He, obeying, suffering, bleeding, and dying, really did fulfil it ; thus perfectly discharging the commission intrusted to Him, and then judge for yourselves, whether it may not be confidently expected that the holy, righteous Father in heaven would set His seal to that felicitously-finished work of His only-begotten Son, not only by raising Him again from the dead, but by causing Him also to return in visible triumph to heaven, whence He had descended to us. One step in the life of Jesus *demanded* and *required* the next. Without the ascension His life were a torso, a fragment, an inexplicable enigma. Take this, moreover, into consideration that, with the sole exception of John, who would have been ready with joy to do the like, all the apostles willingly sealed their belief in the resurrection and ascension of Christ with their blood. How could these clear-witted, discreet, and intelligent men have resolved upon this, if they had not been as certain of both these facts as of their own existence ? Besides, consider that the *resurrection* of Christ absolutely obliges us to accept His *ascension* also. For where could the risen Saviour have remained if He had not returned to His Father ? He must necessarily have tarried somewhere on earth in His glorified body ; or, what is still more inconceivable and contradictory, have died a second time under circumstances that precluded any eye from witnessing it. But, finally, fix your attention



upon that which, as being of permanent importance, imperatively challenges it, the authoritative seal of historical truth which He affixed Himself, in the presence of the whole world, upon the fact of His ascension, by the outpouring, on the tenth day after His return to heaven, of the promised Holy Ghost. If anything be fitted to remove our last doubt, it is the day of Pentecost.

But look, once more, at the order of the historical incidents in connexion with His ascension, as related in the narratives of the evangelists. Can you mistake the strong impress of truth with which it is stamped? The Lord rises from the scene of His deepest humiliation to the throne of glory. The crown of honour was presented to Him by His Father on that very site where, like a worm lying in the dust, He had, for the propitiation of our sins, drunk the cup of His most bitter sufferings, even to the very dregs—practical evidence that He actually received it as the well-merited reward of His finished work of mediation. What are the incidents which transpired at the ascension? Had it been fiction, we should doubtless have seen it clothed in the form of a sentimental parting scene. But we do not find even the slightest trace of this. Our Lord does not speak like one who is taking his last farewell; but, on the contrary, in a tone corresponding with His exalted position, as one who will henceforth, for the first time, really be with His disciples, and will manifest His power on earth. Line by line, all that is reported to us is so thoroughly simple, and in its very simplicity so sublime, so entirely in unison with the deep meaning of His return to heaven, so in accordance with the nature and character of the departing Saviour, that it is absolutely inconceivable that any other pen than that of the most objective truth, should have inscribed this narrative. With dignified composure, as the Conqueror of all opposing powers, and as perfectly certain of the triumphant future of His cause, He spreads



out His hands to bless His disciples, and rises before their eyes until a cloud receives Him out of their sight. The aim of His visible return was attained precisely at that moment. The disciples knew where their Master abode, and therefore the curtain which had been raised might again drop to every mortal eye. But is not the assumption that we should be expected to believe so extraordinary a miracle extravagant? The miracle is not greater than the whole life of the Son of God. The deliverance of the fallen world could only be achieved by means of a chain of miracles. "But," say you, "in accepting Christ's ascension as a fact, is there not an interruption of continuity in the laws of nature?" What laws do you mean? You are probably thinking of the law of gravitation; then of the immeasurable distance of those stars which mortal eyes can reach; and after that of the nature of ether in which no human being is able to breathe. But permit me to suggest that the world of glorified creation has its own peculiar laws, which are indubitably essentially different from those which govern the material world, to which we still belong; and do not overlook the fact that *our* measures of space and time, our ideas of the possible and impossible, cease to be applicable there. There is no doubt but that, beyond that cloud, which received our Lord out of His disciples' sight, the ascension was continued with far greater rapidity than during those moments when the disciples were still permitted to behold it. How swiftly does a ray of light, or flash of lightning, though belonging to the things of this world, traverse the greatest distances! Might not a glorified body, like that of our risen Saviour, fly on the wings of thought? and do not many of our Lord's manifestations during the forty days greatly favour such an assumption? But to the inquiry, whether a creature is still capable of breathing in air excessively rarified or dense, we answer, that everything depends on its organisation. Does



net the fish breathe in deep waters, where a thousand other beings would immediately die? and does not the lark chant forth her song in spheres where our blood-vessels would instantly burst? The restrictions, conditions, and limits to which earthly creatures are subject do not influence spirits; and we who are immured in the earthly and material, can form no sort of conception of the nature of a spiritualised body. Consequently, all objections to the ascension based upon the laws of nature are without weight. We shall one day behold a sphere of creation of whose organisation we had not the slightest idea while here on earth.

II. The fact of the ascension is, then, *historically* sure. But what happened beyond the cloud which concealed the risen Saviour from mortal eyes? This has not remained entirely shrouded in mystery. In other passages of Holy Scripture, and more especially in the Revelation of the apostle John, the veil has been raised. We there see far beyond that cloud; and, oh, what glory beams upon us there! We behold the shining hosts of angels hastening to meet the approaching King with loud exultant songs of homage, and the old word of prophecy is verified, "God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet." We see the companies of the just made perfect, whom no man can number, at the gates of the Holy City fall down and worship the glorified Mediator, and we hear them shout their hallelujahs to Him from the inmost depths of their grateful hearts. And He, with gracious salutations passing through their midst, approaches the throne of the everlasting Father. And in the hand of the latter, the "Ancient of Days," is seen a book written within and without, and sealed with seven seals. And a strong angel approaches, proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book, [it is the book of God's decrees,] and to loose the seals thereof?" And no being equal to the task is found, either in heaven or on



earth. And one of the four and twenty elders standing around the throne takes up the word, and says, "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." And the everlasting Son, the veritable High Priest, approaches, and takes the scroll out of the right hand of Him that sits upon the throne. Then the elders, with their harps and golden vials full of odours, fall down worshipping before Him who is both Priest and Lamb in *one*, and they sing the new song, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth." And a chorus of many thousand angel voices with triumphant joy confirm the same, saying, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." And, like a rushing of many waters, the loud "Amen" resounds throughout the Holy City. And behold, He who was like unto a son of man takes possession of the seat of honour prepared for Him at the right hand of the Father, on the throne of universal dominion, opens the seals of the wondrous book, and "the pleasure of the Lord prospers in his hand." Here, then, some of those things which transpired beyond the cloud are disclosed to your view. It is, indeed, disclosed to us in typical representation; but that which is thus rendered intelligible to our poor human comprehension, is nevertheless *real* and *actual*. In this exaltation of Him who was fairer than the children of men, we rejoice, in the first place, *on His own account*; but do not forget in how exceedingly joyous a sense we also share in this His triumph. In Him who is thus so highly exalted, we are to see, not merely the *Son of God*, but likewise the *second Adam*, our



Advocate, Surety, and Representative. On the day of His ascension, He took possession of heaven, not only for Himself, but also for us. Remember the mysterious relation in which He had entered with us, and the wonderful exchange which He had made with us. By imputation, He assumed our guilt as well as our obligations. Having done so, heaven was, by His own admission, closed even against Himself whilst *in this state of humiliation*. The cherub stationed at the gate of paradise refused even Him admittance, for he saw that His entrance into it was likewise coupled with the indispensable condition that He, in *our* stead, should, under a thousand severe trials, yield perfect satisfaction to the inflexible law, and at the same time should suffer and die to expiate those sins on account of which the curse of the law rested on humanity. He had accomplished both when, on the cross, bowing His head in death, He uttered the triumphal exclamation, "*It is finished!*" Every barrier was now removed, and the gate of the Holy City was once more open before Him. He entered into heaven, not merely, however, as the only-begotten Son of the Father, but as the man who had become a Surety, and who had paid all that was due. Since the obligations which He fulfilled were *ours*, the right of entrance into the world of glory awarded Him was likewise so to us. He took possession of heaven *for us*,—that is, for as many of us as are become one with Him, and *for us* He ever holds it, constantly interceding for us before the Father with His own righteousness.

"But by what road may we hope to enter into this heavenly Jerusalem?" This no longer need excite our solicitude. It lies indeed through the dark *valley of death*; and though without human attendant, it is not solitary, neither are we left alone. You already know what a prospect the Lord revealed to His disciples in His farewell address to them. After the assurance that He was going to prepare



mansions for them, He said: "*And if I go, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*" And what happened to the disciples on the Mount of Olives, whilst, with adoring astonishment, they gazed after their ascending Master? "*Behold,*" the narrative informs us, "*two men stood by them in white apparel, [shining angels,] which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*" These words referred, indeed, first of all to a remote future, and announced that the Prince of Peace should one day visibly return to consummate His kingdom upon earth. But nevertheless the disciples were justified in accepting it as a promise for their last hour, as though our Lord had addressed them, as would a mother, when starting on a journey, saying to her little ones who sorrowfully look on, "Be happy! I am not going away for ever; I am coming back, and shall see you again very soon." And, doubtless, He will appear at the very time when the anxiety of our hearts shall be the most intense; and then, although unseen, in a manner never before experienced, shall we realise His presence and help. It may be that at the very entrance of the harbour a storm shall try our faith. But even if a great struggle should take place at the separation of body and soul, still, how is it possible that we should not come off easy victors, if in the last conflict we hear His greetings, and recognise His hand as that which soothes our last suffering. And were that hour arrived when our weeping friends, standing around our bed, shall whisper to each other, "He has breathed his last—he has ceased to struggle;" then we too shall have commenced that journey, which we here have seen undertaken by our great Forerunner and Pioneer. And when our earthly tabernacle is consigned to its last resting-place,—a "seed sown of God to ripen unto the day of



the harvest,"—then shall we already have entered the golden streets of the eternal heavenly city, led by the hand of our Redeemer. And that which surrounds us there is not some strange and unknown world, in which we feel like lost and deserted children ; but our arrival there will be as our return home from travel to meet again father and mother, brothers and sisters. Just as, at our birth into this world, we found the place in every respect prepared for us,—the little cradle ready standing there, shelter, food, and clothing all provided, while father and mother welcomed us most cordially,—in like manner shall we find everything in the heavenly world in a state most perfectly prepared for us. We have long been known there, we have long been called by our name, and expected with joy. And we may believe that we shall feel infinitely more at home in the beautiful world, free from night and sin, than we ever were whilst on this earth ; and there will be inscribed upon every joy which we there experience, and on every association in which we feel our happiness involved, the one precious word—the word *eternal*. There will be no more occasion to complain, "This it is that pains me, that it is that vexes me, that I cannot sufficiently love Thee ;" but our heart will overflow with fervour, and we shall never want breath to unite with our fellows in glory and happiness, in singing to our full heart's desire the great hallelujah in *His* praise, who has loved us so far beyond all expression, and who has so exalted us.

Such, then, brethren, are our prospects for the future. But whilst I call them ours, I can of course only think of those amongst us who really belong to the company of believers. You others are going another way. But can you wish to tarry longer on *that* road ? Are our paths really henceforth and for ever to be *divergent* ? God forbid it ! Come and travel with us. If the path which you traverse with us be rugged and steep, it is, nevertheless, lovely, and winds



along under the rustling palm-trees of hope. Gather with us around the banner of the cross, render with us homage to the glorified Prince of Peace, and unite with us in the old joyous, and hopeful song of our pilgrimage—

“A pilgrim here I wander,  
On earth have no abode;  
My fatherland is yonder,  
My home is with my God.  
For here I journey to and fro—  
There in eternal rest  
Will God His gracious gift bestow  
On all the toil-oppress'd.”

*Lyra Germanica.*



## XVII.

## THE TIME OF WAITING.

“THE hope of the righteous shall be gladness,” says Solomon in Proverbs x. 28. A consolatory passage indeed, if we but rightly interpret the designation “*righteous*.” We are not to understand by this, righteous according to law; for where would such be found among the children of Adam but in those who have been justified by grace, who, although still sinners in the eye of the law, nevertheless have with their whole heart yielded themselves up to God the Lord, and have seriously determined to live and die for Him? Such as these are, for Christ’s sake, considered *blameless* in the sight of God. But these, however confidently they may repose in the love of God, nevertheless still have to bide their time. All that which they long and pray for does not *immediately* fall into their lap. How long had an Abraham, in all the fulness of divine promises which had been vouchsafed him, to exercise his patience before even one of them was fulfilled! How many sighs and tears were offered by Hannah, Samuel’s pious mother, before her heart’s wish was granted! Think, further, of the author of the thirteenth Psalm, the “man after God’s own heart,” and remember how often he prayerfully sighed, “How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord, for ever? how long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?” as likewise of Paul, that “chosen vessel,” and of his constantly-recurring petition, apparently unheard so long by the Lord, that he



might be relieved from the thorn in his flesh, and from the messenger of Satan, who had been sent to buffet him. But none of these cast away their confidence, but waited and waited on, though often with anxiety and discouragement. But the Lord will never put even the weakest faith to shame. The hope of those saints issued in gladness.

Yes, and so it will ever be. By expectant hope we honour the Lord, we glorify His name before men, we practise humility, that cardinal virtue of the true Christian, and unconsciously attune the harp-strings of our souls to a still more fully intoned hallelujah against that time when that which we believe, and faithfully persevere in believing, shall certainly come to pass. We shall realise that proverb of Solomon, "The hope of the righteous shall be gladness," and likewise the well-known declaration of the Psalmist, "They looked unto him, and were lightened; and their faces were not ashamed," (Psalm xxxiv. 5.)

We are about to enter a circle of *praying and expectant believers*, who will be able, though such is not always the case, within a few days to confirm and indorse from their own experience the saying of Solomon. Let us in spirit join these beloved brethren, and may the Lord graciously tune our hearts in harmony with theirs!

ACTS i. 12-26.

"Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath-day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphæus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered



with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity ; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem ; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein : and his bishoprick let another take. Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out amongst us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots : and the lot fell upon Matthias ; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

The Sunday (*Exaudi*\*) which intervenes between the Day of Ascension and Whitsuntide has, and not without some truth, been called the "orphan child" among the Sundays of the ecclesiastical year. The Lord has ascended into heaven, and His manifestation on the day of Pentecost is still to come. This Sunday stands thus isolated between the two festivals ; the orphan child, however, bears a precious treasure in its little casket,—the promise, "I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh,"—and says, prayerfully and hopefully, *Exaudi!*—i.e., "Hear my prayer." In days of yore, this *Exaudi* formed the key-note in the hearts of the believers during the intervening time. We feel powerfully attracted to them. It is edifying, consolatory, and instructive to linger in their midst. Well, let us in spirit join their company, and consider, in the first place, the *state of soul* of the disciples at this juncture ; then, *the address* of one of their number ; and, lastly, *the act* which they perform : and let us gratefully accept, as from the Lord, all spiritual profit

\* Psalm cxliii.



and blessing which may be vouchsafed to us whilst meditating upon this apparently destitute Sunday!

I. The disciples, in returning from Mount Olivet to Jerusalem, did as our Lord before His ascension had commanded them. We here find them in one of those upper chambers of those buildings which surrounded the temple, and which were daily open to all those who wished to retire for prayer or pious conversation. And what an assembly it was! As far as outward appearance and splendour are concerned, it was poor. Were all the kings and emperors, all the men of science and learning, all the poets and artists in the world, to be gathered together in congress, they would never form an assembly so important, so pregnant with reference to the future, and so rich in promise for the progress of the world, as that assembled there. Therefore, let no one ever judge from mere appearances; and specially, be on your guard against being imposed upon by what are styled majorities. The company assembled in the porch of the temple numbered but a hundred and twenty souls; but to whom was the future of the world committed? To this handful of insignificant Galileans, divested of all external respectability? or to the millions in Judea and Jerusalem who looked down upon *them* with a scornfully-affected superiority? Were not the former right in every respect? and did not the surging, raging multitude, however proudly it might raise its head, go entirely astray, bound with the fetters of delusion and blindness? In society, uniform opinion and similar modes of expression constitute what we are wont to designate "the prevailing tendencies of the times," or "public opinion;" and how frequently are these checked and brought back to the point from which they started by the sentiments, boldly stated and firmly maintained, of one resolute public man! For it then happens that, for a time, this *one man* will, as a spiritual despot, rule over hosts of his contemporaries, who



then appear in the miserable and despicable character of his servile copyists and train-bearers. I say, however, emphatically, *for a time*. In the last century only, how many philosophical and political doctrines and systems, streams issuing from the fountain-head of error and deception, have for a time inundated the whole world, and then subsided! And doubt not, that the muddy torrent which overspreads the world at present under the ostentatious name of "advanced science and culture," will also, in its time, pass away. The gospel, however, *remains*, and emerges entire and uninjured from every whirlpool which threatened to engulf it. Why? Because it has an incorruptible advocate in *conscience*, seated in the human breast, from which it cannot be dislodged, and which perpetually proves itself to be, to every one inclined to trust it, a "power of God," calculated not only to bless, but to sanctify. Therefore, as to the gospel, there is no cause of apprehension. It is true that believers are now in the minority. But what matters that? In which camp does the Lord abide? We have His promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," (Matt. xviii. 20;) and again and again has He stamped the impress of His seal upon this His promise, by its fulfilment in the experience of thousands.

Amongst the hundred and twenty who were assembled at Jerusalem, the sacred narrative specially mentions the women—those who had never left their Lord and Master, not even at His cross and grave, and whose heroic love put the men to utter shame. The Holy Ghost here erects a new tablet of honour to these faithful ones, in order that their faith and constancy may be spoken of even to the end of time. Their names are written in the book of life as well as on these sacred pages. Adorned with the heavenly crown, they have long surrounded the throne of God. Oh! my sisters, to whom I now more specially address myself, come and asso-



ciate yourselves with these disciples as companions in their faith! You can attain to no higher honour here on earth than to belong to their choir. In the apostolic narrative, Mary, the mother of our Lord, is again specially mentioned among the women. Looking upon this quiet circle, the eye fastens upon her; no longer, however, as the broken-hearted one whom we saw standing at the foot of the cross; for, since *His* resurrection and ascension, her soul, which had previously been pierced as with a sword, was now for ever healed, and her mourning for the son of her body converted into exultant joy in Him as her Mediator and Saviour. For there is no doubt but that she knew herself to be a poor sinner in God's sight, even as others. Therefore she is not in this assembly engaged as an intercessor for them; but, on the contrary, prostrating herself in the dust together with them, she implored intercession with the Father of the only and everlasting High Priest, who had been raised to the right hand of the Majesty on high, in common with them all. It appears that, soon after the day of Pentecost, she entered the Jerusalem above. What a spectacle must this meeting have been to the denizens of heaven!

The eleven, with whom, as His most intimate friends, our Lord was wont to be surrounded, were the choicest part and centre of this assembly at Jerusalem. Who shall describe the feelings of these men? What prayerful desires, blissful hopes, and great expectations gushed like a torrent through their minds! We here find them already freed from much error and misapprehension, to which they previously had been subject. By their Master's death, resurrection, and ascension, their conception of the constitution of God's kingdom upon earth had undergone a thorough purification. Their apprehensions of their Lord's person had, through the influence of these events, almost ceased to be clouded. Since they who were invested with the apostolic office had it im-



posed on them, as a duty paramount to every other, to publish the fact that the work of atonement had been wrought out, they needed an increase of light and elevation to render definite the vague perceptions of it which had up to this period filled their minds. They needed also to be thoroughly enlightened as to the meaning of Christ's having disabled Satan, and His having taken away the sting of death; as also of His mediation between a sinful world and a holy God. And how greatly did they need to be endowed with courage, with power from on high, and with a plenitude of other gifts, in order that they might really be strong enough to become pillars of the new kingdom of peace on earth! Their hearts were like a well-tilled field, but in which the crop was languishing for want of rain and sunshine. Though on former occasions they had not always received the intimation of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them with due interest, how deeply did they feel its importance now, and long for the moment of its fulfilment! Their whole soul was prayer, and they irresistibly brought their fellow-believers to entertain the same views. We find them daily assembled in that quiet apartment of the temple, where they "continued," as the narrative relates, "with one accord in prayer and supplication." O sublime assembly, soaring on eagle's wings above the heights of earth! We see in it the seed of a new nature implanted by God, and feel that, since what their souls pant for relates solely to the imperishable and eternal, their desire cannot fail to be realised.

II. Thus whilst the little flock awaited with the greatest anxiety that which was about to happen, it came to pass one day that while they were again met for prayer, suddenly one amongst them arose to submit an important proposition to his brethren. It was Simon Peter. Deeply affected, he first reminded them of the tragic end of their fellow-apostle Judas. The last thing that would have occurred to the disciple, upon



whose eyelids a tear trembled at his own denial, would have been to make mention of that wretched man, if it had not been opportune for him to found the proposition which he was about to make to his brethren on a text of Scripture. "According to Scripture," he begins, and probably is thinking especially of the words in Psalm xli. 9, "He who did eat of my bread hath lifted up his heel against me," which the Lord himself had expressly applied to the traitor,—“Judas became a guide to them that took Jesus ; for he was numbered with us, and had obtained a part of this ministry. Now this man,” continues Peter, “purchased a field with the reward of iniquity, [*i.e.*, it was owing to him that a field was bought with the price of blood, that for which he betrayed his Lord, in which his body was buried after his death ;] and falling headlong, [when the cord with which he had hung himself broke, and the branch of the tree, as though with horror and aversion, shook off its accursed fruit,] he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.” We learn from these words that the field in which he had been interred was the same spot where this miserable man committed suicide, and which he, falling headlong, had covered with his body, and had literally seized and taken possession of as an inheritance. He had preferred the earthly to the heavenly, and, now he possessed it ; a dreadful irony of Divine justice was involved in this gloomy fate. Peter continues—“And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem, insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, *Aceldama*, that is to say, *The field of blood*,” (in remembrance of the bloody end of the traitor, and of the innocent blood which he had betrayed.) This field, however, was situate in the valley of Hinnom,—which was never mentioned by the Jews but with horror,—in which in former days children had been sacrificed to Moloch, and which was regarded as laden with the curse of the Almighty. Peter in



his speech then refers to Psalm lxi., where David, as the Old Testament type of the Messiah, curses his enemies, and especially adduces, (ver. 25,) "Let their habitation be desolate, and let none dwell in their tents." He applies these words to the dreadful desolation and waste of the field in which Judas was interred, and then quotes Psalm cix. 8, which contains the same meaning, expressed in the words, "His bishoprick [*i.e.*, the office which had been intrusted to him whom God had now rejected] *let another take.*" By this text he specially establishes the necessity that the apostolic charge of Judas should be transferred to another. You have here again the opportunity to observe what the sacred writings of the *Old Testament* were to the apostles. They recognised no difference between the *Scriptures* and the *Word of God* in Scripture. The whole Scripture was God's word to them, and they rested on their Master's assertion, "The Scripture cannot be broken." Let persons but continue, as they are wont now-a-days publicly, to declaim that the Scriptures are not God's Word, but that it must be submitted to the judgment of reason what portion shall be held to be divine and what to be human; the common man will then but too quickly, and others with him likewise, logically deem that God's word in Scripture is restricted to that which man shall be pleased to admit as such. If the authority of the Bible in the world be thus continuously undermined, you will in a short time see human society, with all its regulations and institutions, shattered in such a manner as will make many a man's hair stand on end.

After Peter had thus adequately supported and based his proposition on Scripture, he addressed them as follows:—  
"Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a



*witness with us of his resurrection."* Mark well these words. Ocular and auricular testimony of our Lord's entire public life, up to the time of its glorious issue, is here set forth as the first and most indispensable condition associated with induction into the apostolic charge. Hence you may see on how firm and sure a foundation this belief rests. Among the apostles whose writings have been handed down to us, Matthew, John, Peter, and James fully met this claim; and Paul likewise had, to say the least of it, with his bodily eyes, seen Christ after His resurrection and exaltation. At the same time, observe what a high importance the apostles attach to our Lord's resurrection, and to the historical credibility of this miracle. And this they were fully warranted in doing. Upon this *one* event, if truly established as a *fact*, everything must of necessity be shattered, which ever has been, or ever shall be, adduced against Christianity. Do not doubt, our Church stands on a *rock*, and the gates of hell, as they have not prevailed, so likewise they never shall prevail throughout eternity, against it.

III. Peter's proposition carried conviction to the minds of those who were assembled at Jerusalem; and so much the more, since, in accordance with the express command of our Lord, the apostles were to aim, in the first place, at the conversion of *Israel*, and, following the old chiefs of the twelve tribes as types, were to form the twelve patriarchs of the new and spiritual Israel. It was therefore *necessary* that their number of *twelve* should be complete. Paul, also, was afterwards an apostle, but not one of the twelve. These represented specially the Church which sprang from the seed of Abraham. There was likewise involved in this number twelve, a sublime promise for a remote future. Moreover, Peter did not address his speech merely to his ten fellow-apostles, but in his "Men and brethren" had in his eye, *all* the disciples who were present in the assembly. They all,



as an *integral body*, promoted to the high office Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias—men who had, by their approved piety and spiritual endowments, shewn themselves better qualified for it than the rest. Doubtless both were among the *seventy*. We likewise here already see the body of believers exercising ecclesiastical functions as a church, which they were divinely authorised and called upon to perform ; of course in a regular manner, grounded on individual faith. After having made this appointment, the assembly united in prayer to God. “And they prayed, and said, *Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.*” There is no doubt that the “Lord, who knew the hearts of all men,” to whom they addressed their prayer, was none other than the *Lord Jesus*, whom they had likewise already worshipped at the time of His ascension ; and there is likewise also no doubt but that he who cannot pray to Jesus has never yet known Him. Having prayed, they cast lots, in humble acknowledgment of their circumscribed powers ; for it belonged to the dignity of an apostle that he should have been elected and set apart immediately by the Lord himself. The lot fell upon Matthias, and our Lord afterwards practically confirmed that it had been “cast” in His name. Matthias perfectly fulfilled his office as an apostle. Scripture, it is true, does not relate anything concerning it. Tradition speaks of the success which crowned his labours, first in Judea, and afterwards in Ethiopia ; from which latter country, he entered the “Church triumphant” above, adorned with a martyr’s crown. It is true that some recent commentators maintain that the disciples had exceeded their authority in thus choosing an apostle ; that they wilfully anticipated our Lord’s appoint-



ment, who afterwards refused to sanction that of Matthias, and introduced Paul in his stead, as twelfth in the circle of the apostles. But there is not the slightest ground for such an assertion. The sacred narrative, on the contrary, represents the act of election as extremely solemn and sacred, and as such, most certainly, pleasing in the sight of God. It is also inconceivable that our Lord should not have responded to the faithfulness of purpose, and to the humble submissive devotion with which the disciples prayerfully referred the decision to Him. Had He refused to recognise it, He would certainly have informed them of it in some manner; which, however, He never did. Besides, we nowhere learn that when Paul had subsequently to strive so much with the Jewish Christians concerning his right to the apostleship, it ever even occurred to him to object to the election of Matthias, and to claim for himself to be placed the twelfth among the apostles. He simply declares that, notwithstanding the precedence of the twelve, who were first ordained to lay the foundation of the kingdom of God, he *likewise* was an apostle, and that by divine vocation and endowment he stood *officially* their equal.

Thus, then, were the vessels prepared at Jerusalem, into which the streams of the new divine life could flow unimpeded. The number of devout believers undoubtedly increased from day to day, and when the day of Pentecost dawned, it may certainly be assumed that the five hundred brethren, to whom our Lord manifested Himself after His resurrection, were amongst them. Would that the susceptibilities of those praying disciples were vouchsafed to us also, in our contemplation of the day of Pentecost! In that assembly at Jerusalem, you see nothing less than the anti-type of those whom the ark of Noah once bore so safely across the billows of the universal deluge, the former being indeed immeasurably more blessed. In it, you see the



genealogical root of the *new Israel of God*, which will *remain* to the end of time. It is only as we are ingrafted with those who were thus awaiting the day of Pentecost, that we shall ever flourish in the courts of our God. May the Lord be pleased to bind us up with them "in the bundle of life," (1 Sam. xxv. 29,) and graciously hear us when we imploringly cry with the poet—

"Oh, touch our tongues with flame  
When speaking Jesus' name,  
And lead us up the heavenward road !  
Give us the power to pray,  
Teach us what words to say,  
Whene'er we come before our God.  
O highest Good ! our spirits cheer;  
When raging foes are strong and near,  
Give us brave hearts undimm'd by fear.

"O golden rain from heaven  
Thy precious dew be given  
To bless the churches' barren field!  
And let Thy waters flow  
Where'er the sowers sow  
The seed of truth, that it may yield  
A hundred-fold its living fruit,  
O'er all the land may take deep root,  
And mighty branches heavenward shoot."

*Lyra Germanica.*



## XVIII.

## THE DAY OF PENTECOST.

WHAT a glorious and significant festival is the feast of Pentecost ! It is the feast of the union of heaven and earth, the feast of God's betrothal with redeemed man, the birthday feast of the New Testament Church, the harvest home of those who have been "brought nigh by the blood of Christ." What would all the other festivals of our Church be without this one ? They would be only messengers extolling acts of beneficence in which we ourselves might never hope to share ; heralds, inviting us to a marriage supper, the entrance to which we could never find. Whitsuntide enables us to enjoy those splendours which the other feasts have disclosed to our view. Whitsuntide brings to us the cupbearer, as it were, who first crushes the divine grapes of Christ's merits in the goblet, and presents it to us as a restorative draught. Let us therefore congratulate ourselves upon the joyous harvest-day of the new covenant, and may the Lord attune our souls to higher songs of gratitude and praise !

The old prophets, and amongst their number, Isaiah in chap. xliii. 18, led the world to anticipate by prophecies repeated over and over again, that the Lord would "do a new thing" on the earth. That which was then in their mind's eye, was not merely in a general manner, the founding of a new covenant, as a covenant of grace, but more especially



that which forms the subject of our feast of Whitsuntide—the day of Pentecost, with its immeasurably blessed results. In what does this miracle consist? What was this event of *world-wide importance* through all time, which occurred at Jerusalem on that great Pentecostal day? It is the answer to this question to which we now address ourselves. The Lord grant that we may find the right one!

The signification of all other Christian festivals is more or less obvious to us all. Each has its own peculiarity and novelty. If Christmas be the festival of the manifestation of the incarnate God, the theme of Passion-week is “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” Good Friday fully relieves us from conscious guilt by means of the great Sacrifice. At Easter we see Him “who was delivered for our offences *raised again* for our justification.” On Ascension-day He ascends as our Head and Forerunner, to open to us the world of glory, to take possession of it on our behalf, and to prepare a place for us there. And Whitsuntide? You say “at Whitsuntide the Holy Ghost came!” Quite true. But did the Holy Spirit not come till then? Have we not heard King David say, “Take not thy Holy Spirit from me?” Well then, what transpired at Whitsuntide that was strictly new, and before unknown? That is precisely what we are now about seriously to inquire into.

ACTS ii. 1–13.

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now, when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed, and marvelled,



saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes, and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking, said, These men are full of new wine."

This is the history of Whitsuntide, as wonderful in its meaning as it is plain and simple in its description. It reminds us of the history of creation, and is it not such itself? It informs us, indeed, of nothing less than of the establishment of a new moral world. Come, let us consider more closely the history of the entrance of the Holy Spirit! *How did He enter? and who is He that thus enters?* in what sense may it be said of Him, that *He came first miraculously* on the day of Pentecost? And *how do we become personally conscious of His saving operation?* May the Lord grant us the guidance of His light and His truth, to enable us to solve these points.

I. Prophetic annunciations, pregnant with importance, had been published throughout ages which precluded the day of Pentecost. Prophet after prophet gave the believers in Israel reason to hope for a time when the same Spirit, who at creation moved upon the face of the waters, should powerfully manifest Himself on earth in a manner previously unheard of. John, the herald of the Messiah, spoke to those who came to be baptized with water by him, of a wondrous baptism of fire which was even then imminent; and you know full well how repeatedly and emphatically our Lord gave expression to the promise of "another Comforter" whom the Father would send in His name. What marvel is it then that the disciples so anxiously expected the hour when the prospect thus disclosed to them should be realised?



On the early morning of Sunday, the fiftieth day after Easter, we again visit Jerusalem in quest of the disciples. The holy city, swarming with strangers and pilgrims from far and near, glitters in the festive garb of the feast of first fruits. We again find the little flock, "with one accord," assembled in one of the spacious halls of the temple for prayer and supplication, intent but upon *one thing*, and that one not of this world. They all alike and strongly feel the need of preparation and endowment from above, without being distinctly conscious what it was that they thus needed. They wait—and wait! What occurs? Though the sky is clear and cloudless, a mysterious sound, like that of "a mighty rushing wind," is suddenly heard over the city, almost reminding us of Jehovah's approach to Mount Sinai at the giving of the law, as described by Moses; slowly and majestically it continues its course, and whilst the people, astounded, rush out into the streets, it approaches the temple on Mount Zion, and, suddenly halting there, it filled all the house in which the disciples, met for prayer, were sitting. At first, indeed, they were not a little terrified, but, nevertheless, being by this time somewhat versed in symbolic annunciations, they soon anticipate what is about to happen; and the last doubt is entirely dissipated, when the "rushing mighty wind" discharges a glittering shower of tongue-shaped flames, of which one rests upon each of their heads; and, at the same moment, their hearts burn with a holy glow of feeling such as they never before experienced. With what energy that celestial fire flashes through their souls! The stream of love, light, and joy that rushes into their souls is miraculous! The narrative informs us, "*They were all filled with the Holy Ghost*;" and so it was. With exultant shouts of praise they respond to this salutation of power and blessing, which was the first vouchsafed them from their



Master since His ascension to the right hand of God ; and then, obeying an irresistible impulse to bear their testimony, they present themselves to the crowd outside, which, led by the mysterious, whirlwind-like murmur, had followed it to Mount Zion, summoned as by a celestial tocsin, and there stood without in feverish expectation.

And of what are we next informed ? The apostles begin to speak, and, with fervent inspiration, declare to the moving masses,—to the thousands of the inhabitants of the holy city, as likewise to the pious foreigners, pilgrims from all parts of the world,—the “*wonderful works of God*” (Acts ii. 2) in His plan of man’s redemption. And in what language do they proclaim them ? Observe the surprise, nay, more, the amazement, with which the multitude listen to their words. They whisper to each other, “*Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans ?* And how hear we every man *in our own tongue, wherein we were born ?*” And now they recount the nations amongst whom they dwell, and their vernaculars, and add, “*We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.*” The narrative proceeds, “*And they were all amazed, and were in doubt ;*” i.e., they did not know what to say to it, and, moved with apprehension, they spake one to another, “*What meaneth this ?*” But some—probably the inhabitants of Jerusalem—who, by reason of their continued wilful opposition to the power of truth, were visited with hardness of heart as a judgment, mocked, saying, “*These men are full of new wine.*”

But did the inspired disciple really speak in the tongues of all the different nations which are here mentioned ? How can any one still doubt it ? We read that each foreigner heard his own vernacular language. The Mede heard Median ; the inhabitant of Egypt, Egyptian ; the Roman,



Latin ; the native of Asia Minor, Greek. But perhaps it was a mere belief on their part that they heard their mother tongue, though it was not actually spoken. In that case, what here affects us with astonishment took place in the ears of the hearers, and the miracle is only transferred, but is not set aside. It is, however, perfectly evident that the inspired narrator represents the miracle as having taken place in the *mouths of the speakers*. But how could these ignorant fishermen and publicans so suddenly clothe their thoughts in forms of speech which they had not only never learned, but some of which, at least, they had never even heard? Truly it is necessary, in order not to be staggered at the circumstances reported here, to believe in the existence of a personal and living God, ruling the universe in the exercise of unlimited power. But how can any man who is not an atheist raise an objection contrary to Christ's express assurance, that, "*with God all things are possible?*" The Pentecostal miracle of tongues is not greater than all others, but in its effects it was certainly only momentary and transitory. At least, we have no proof that the disciples continued to be masters of all those foreign languages. To what purpose, then, was this miracle? In the first place, it attested the creative power of the Holy Ghost, who had now come in a manner which was obvious to every one. Secondly, it served to give a palpable demonstration of the fact that barriers within which the Jews had hitherto been encircled, excluding the rest of the world, were now removed, and that the time had arrived when all nations should be called into the kingdom of God. And, lastly, it was a sublime typical representation of the surrender of the keys of the whole world into the hands of the apostles, and bore prophetic reference to the future which so surely lay before them, when "*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory*



*of God the Father.*" To this very day we have those who are akin in spirit to those Jewish libertines who made the miracle wrought at Pentecost a subject of derision ; but they cannot succeed in deceiving us, since by their mockery they but seek to hide their embittered anger and their secret despair. They acutely feel the highly prophetic and symbolic meaning of this miracle, and can no longer conceal from themselves that the very worst is henceforth most certainly to be apprehended for the kingdom of the father of lies, under whose banners they serve.

II. Thus the Holy Spirit descended, under the significant types and figures of wind and fire ; the former being the great purifier of the atmosphere, and the latter the refining and warming element. "*Who is the Holy Ghost ?*" Let us not remain satisfied with that which the world now-a-days, in its self-inflicted kindness, is wont to understand by the designation "Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit is something totally different from what we apprehend by hallowed inspiration. It is something different, likewise, from the "*spirit of the Church ;*" by which expression is indicated the style of thought, feeling, and action peculiar to the Christian Church. Neither, likewise, is the being of the Holy Spirit yet recognised where He is only apprehended as an illuminating and vivifying influence proceeding from God. He is more than an unpersonal Divine energy. Let us see what explanation Holy Scripture gives us concerning His nature.

As you know, our Lord Christ announced the Holy Spirit as "another Comforter," who, sent from Him and His Father, should, after His return to heaven, supply His place to His disciples,—should guide them into all truth,—should remind them of all that their Lord had declared to them,—should convince them of sin and of their need of redemption,—should glorify Him, the fairest of the children of men, throughout the world,—and should transform and renovate



everything. In the baptismal formula the King of truth places the Holy Spirit side by side with the Father and Himself, the Son, as possessing equal authority and dignity. When the apostles implore the blessing of God upon the churches, they supplicate it in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and as expressly distinguish the supreme *Three* from one another as they likewise expressly maintain their unity. They distinguish no less unequivocally between the *Holy Spirit* and *His operations* and *gifts*. Among other passages, we read, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians—"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit;" and then again—"All these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will;" further—"The Spirit searcheth all things;" in another place—"No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost;" and—"We know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us." The Holy Spirit is, then, presented to us in the Scriptures as a *coequal* Divine Personality. Only extreme blindness or wicked perverseness can disallow it.

This is the position in which we stand with reference to the mystery of *the Holy Trinity*, which forms the basis of all Christianity. If, at the first blush, here and there, one amongst us should recoil in surprise, we shall not be disposed hastily to rebuke him severely, since there is no other doctrine of Scripture so utterly beyond the range of our natural mental apprehension. But beware here of misapprehension and false interpretation. Scripture nowhere imposes on us belief in that which is *contrary to reason*, as would be the case, were they required, that we should at one and the same time believe *one* to be *three*, and *three* to be but *one*. In point of number, there are indeed *three*; but again, in essence, the *three* are one. Not as if the Father were a God,



and the Son a God, and the Holy Spirit a God, as though there were *three* different Gods ; but as though the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost were all God, *i.e.*, of divine essence and nature. But again, the equality of the three must not be exaggerated. Although the Son and the Holy Ghost are equal to the Father in divine *nature* and *essence*, the latter differs from the other two with regard to the fatherhood, since the Son was begotten of the Father, and the Holy Ghost proceeded from the Father and the Son. The three constitute, however, but one Triune God, not only because of the love which unites them, but likewise by the unity of their majesty, their will, and their action. Our world offers nothing properly analogous to this relation. In order to bring this subject nearer to human apprehension, we have indeed been called upon to conceive of an eminently gifted and highly intelligent artist, who should succeed in expressing and rendering *visible*, in an exquisite masterpiece, all the sublime, the ideal, and the divinely-beautiful which filled his imagination, and in which his whole inspired soul lived and moved. Then we might conceive this figure, on issuing from the artist's hands, to be suddenly endowed with life, and with the capability of receiving and reciprocating love. Were this realised the great artist would be visibly and objectively transferred into his statue as into an *alter-ego*, a second self ; then here again there would be *two*, yet only *one*. This figure displays to us only one aspect of the truth, namely, that the eternal and all-sufficient God, in whom no mutableness, but an impulse emanating from the fulness of His Godhead, acting from all eternity, and before creation, must have moved Him to the self-origination, as it were, of a second self : He reproduced His own image as the only worthy object of His love and His complacency, whom He essentially and practically endowed with His own adorable attributes ; and this personal reflection of the Divine



glory is the only-begotten Son. There is, however, nothing sublunary that corresponds with the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son, since His personality is co-equal. Thus, then, the Holy Trinity, though involving nothing contradictory in itself, remains an inscrutable mystery to human apprehension, (I do not say to our experience.) It has, however, been revealed to us by God the Holy Ghost himself, whose province it is to discover "the deep things of God." It was not, however, announced to us in order that we might speculate about it idly, and with no definite result, but that we might profit by it to our salvation. It is enough that we, enlightened by the operation of the *Spirit*, believingly embrace the *Son* as poor sinners, and come to the *Father* through the *Son*. I will just observe, in passing, that the doctrine of the Trinity of the Godhead is not only dimly foreshadowed in the Old Testament, but is to be met with, though in a corrupted form, in the theological systems of all the ancient nations. Doubtless, this doctrine was amongst the primary divine revelations which, though corrupted and masked by sin, were, in Christ, restored to their original purity.

But how can it be said of the Holy Ghost that He came first on the day of Pentecost? Was it not He who, from the beginning of the world, Himself evinced His power as the medium of God's revelations to man, equipping and arming the heroes of Israel, enlightening and pervading the minds of the old Jewish prophets, so that it could be said of them, "They spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Yes, indeed! But, nevertheless, we hear the apostle John say, in the seventh chapter of his Gospel, "*The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.*" The question will then naturally arise, whether the Holy Ghost, which operated under the old covenant, was not *essentially another* from Him who made His solemn entry



amongst us on the day of Pentecost? But this question we must decidedly answer in the *negative*. He was the same Spirit, and only entered into more intimate, cordial, and, at the same time, more energetic connexion with the redeemed world of sinners, after Christ had matured His work of mediation; and we are as fully justified in saying that the Holy Spirit first came to us at the Feast of Pentecost, as we are in saying we only admit of Christ's advent upon earth having taken place when He was born in human form, though previously, in the days of the old covenant, the Son of God had appeared upon earth. According to divine appointment, made in the exercise of divine sovereignty, He then only first came to fix His abode *permanently* with us in the character of King in Zion. Whereas in the *old* covenant He appeared rather as the Advocate of God with men, He appears in the *new* as the Advocate of redeemed humanity with God. If, under the former dispensation, it was peculiarly His province to found the kingdom of light and truth in all its length and breadth, it has, under the latter dispensation, been more especially His to mould, seal, and protect each individual of those who had been bought with the blood of the Lamb. Though His primary and leading motive was, so to speak, the Father's decree and plan of government, yet is He now mainly moved by love to us, in whom the divine counsels of peace have, through Christ, been consummated. Just as the training of man for that salvation which was about to be introduced, was that which He *then* had most at heart, so *now* does He exert Himself in imparting to a sinful world all the fulness of that salvation which Christ by mediation has obtained. How great and manifold were the things denied to believers in the days of the law! Their *consciences* had not even been quickened. And still less was the doctrine of justification by faith fully realised by them, but rather dimly perceived. As yet they



could not with full conviction say with the apostle, "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." Confiding prayer in "the name of Jesus" was not yet practised by them. Even the holy of holies was yet hidden behind a thick veil, and the way to it was "*not yet made manifest*," (Heb. ix. 8.) And how far they were from being able to testify, as Paul afterwards did—"I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." The Holy Ghost was "*not yet given*" to accomplish so creative and thorough a work of redemption in the inmost soul of man. Not until the great Sacrifice had been offered on the altar of the cross, and Christ had been glorified, did this effectual, regenerating, and renewing work of the Holy Ghost begin. It had now not only become possible, but it was likewise in perfect harmony with the divine decrees, that the Spirit of Christ should essentially glorify Christ in Christ's members, and make them share the nature of the Son of God. If you desire to render the difference of the Spirit's working under the law and under the gospel obvious, compare characters such as Moses, Elijah, or even David, with John, Peter, or Paul. All these men are conspicuous for their piety as men "after God's own heart," and yet how different is the stamp they bear. There is discoverable in the latter class an inner life, holier, and more deeply rooted in God, whilst at the same time more full and solid, than in the former. You immediately feel that what our Lord said with regard to His redeemed ones, could in no wise be applied to the Old Testament believers—"He that believeth on me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." "This," adds the evangelist, at this passage, "*spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given.*" It will also now be evident to you what our Lord's meaning was, when He, in reply to the question of the two "sons of thunder"—"Lord,



wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume the ungrateful Samaritans?"—rebuked them in these terms: "*Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.*"

III. Thus much with reference to the Holy Spirit, and His entrance into the world at the feast of Pentecost! You will now desire to acquire a knowledge of His *practical manifestations* in human life, and to learn how we may become personally conscious of His operations. You know that His *wondrous works* are very numerous. We will, however, specify but three, of which the two first already belong to history, but the third continues uninterruptedly to the present hour. I put, in the first place, the production of the *Holy Scriptures*, the origination of the *Word of God*. What a structure is here presented to us! More than a thousand years elapsed before its completion; and yet what unity there is in the *plan* on which it is based, in the *spirit* which pervades it, and in the thoughts, views, and doctrines which are treasured up in it! If we only enter upon the study of it calmly and collectedly, we shall soon feel compelled to exclaim with the patriarch, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" We are here withdrawn from all the lower spheres of life, and breathe an atmosphere which meets us nowhere else. With what solemnity does it impress us! We feel ourselves within the precincts of a temple, and near the throne of God. And now let us interrogate this wondrous book on all the questions of vital importance to humanity, let us listen to its solutions, which are calculated as much to enlighten the mind as to pacify the heart! Whence is the universe? "God created it out of nothing." Whence is sin? "Man, though created sinless and free, fell by his own fault." Whence came the misery that is in the world? "Sin has begotten it." What is the original destiny of



man? "Likeness to God." But how can sinful man attain to this? "God has helped and helps us still, because He is a living God, and love itself." But how has He helped in times past? how does He help now? "He sent a Mediator and the spirit of regeneration." What is the issue and end of the regenerate? "They change the pilgrim garb of this mortal body for a robe of heavenly glory." Traverse the whole world, and knock at the doors of all the schools of philosophy, and *where* will you meet a solution of any one of those great problems which so perfectly satisfies both head and heart as is conveyed to you in this sacred Word? Nowhere! And is this Word man's composition? Shall it be held to be a production of that people on the banks of the Jordan, of so little repute in the world, so far surpassed both in science and art by the Greeks and the Romans; and, moreover, naturally so foolish, so obstinate, and so constantly prone to idolatry? Impossible! From whatever aspect you may regard the Bible, it ever bears the stamp of God's Word in itself, palpably and obviously. It is a work of the Holy Spirit; and those who have uttered or written the word, all testify with the apostle in perfect heartfelt truth: "*We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things which are freely given us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing (i.e., judging and explaining) spiritual things with spiritual.*"

If you desire me to shew you another miraculous work of the Spirit, look at the multitude of disciples after the feast of Pentecost, and compare the condition in which they once met you. Even on the day of His ascension they were but as mere children in understanding, full of foolish thoughts as to their Master's real plan, and likewise concerning their



own vocation; and, moreover, how dependent they were; how utterly spiritless. Humanly speaking, hardly anything could be expected from them. But look once more upon these poor fishermen and publicans after they have received the Pentecostal baptism. Do you recognise them? There they stand, beacons to the world, pillars of the kingdom of heaven, more intelligent than the greatest of those whom *this* world calls wise, more intrepid than the boldest heroes of whom history makes mention. Animated by a loftier spirit, they win over to the banner of the cross those who were most opposed. They were stimulated and impelled by such love, devotedness, and such contempt of the world and of death, as had never before been seen on earth. And is this sudden transformation to be accounted for as the effect of natural causes? The apostles are "*miracles*," just as the prophets were once so called in the Old Testament. They laud the creative power of the Holy Spirit in all they have within them, and with all that they possess, and are His living monuments and instruments recognisable from afar.

But our necessities are not provided for by the mere contemplation and recognition of the operations of the Holy Spirit. We must be personally conscious of His wondrous operations within us. The Holy Ghost must meet us in the little laboratory of our own heart. And can that be? *It can and must!* Hear what the apostle says—"We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God." Blessed Paul! Would that we all were able to boast the same! By nature we have the *spirit of the world*, which is nothing less than the *innate* and natural mode of thought, feeling, judgment, and action by which one may indeed, as measured by the standard of the world, be perfectly moral, true to duty, and accomplished; but we want that faculty for the apprehension of divine things, that sanctified in-



terior, nay, all that is termed in Scripture, "*The hidden man of the heart, which is in the sight of God of great price.*" The head is full of error, the heart overgrown with the weeds of evil passions, the conscience slumbers, and the will is enslaved by the flesh. A man in this state does nothing from pure *love* to God, and yet will not even hear of the estrangement from God in which he is living; he has no conception of the holiness of God's nature and will, and really understands nothing of God's Word. He misinterprets Peter's exclamation, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." The divine tribunal excites no fear, because he imagines God will not be strict to mark iniquity. He indulges in anger, he hates, he envies, he is covetous of all vain glory, he idolises mammon, he follows his own fleshly lusts; and yet it does not occur to him to condemn himself for it, nor does it even weigh upon his conscience. These **are** the features that characterise the man in whom no other spirit has yet ruled save the *natural one*, the spirit of this world. If you are still such a one, even before you are aware of it, a most wonderful change may take place in you. Wherever and whenever it may happen, whether whilst you are reading or hearing God's Word, or during heavy trials, or aught else which may befall you, a light suddenly bursts upon you, as if scales fell from your eyes. That which in yourself you once held to be a mere failing, appears as *sin* worthy of punishment; your good deeds, as fruits matured by selfishness; your life, hitherto as one, which even if it has not been squandered in mere inanities, has at least only been exhausted upon self; and your hope of an anticipated favourable sentence from the world's great Judge, as an unfounded imagination of your own infatuated mind.



You discover that you have hitherto lived without fellowship with God. A silent and ever-increasing sorrow gradually overspreads your mind. You begin to long for grace, for a filial relationship towards God, for release from the bonds with which you are fettered ; and the same sigh will escape your soul as did that of Paul when he exclaimed, "Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Then gradually Jesus of Nazareth rises before your soul in a light in which you never beheld Him. "Yes," exclaims your heart, panting for salvation, "Thou art He! Thou art my Helper, my Redeemer, and my only Saviour!" With earnest longing you incline to Him, and confidently surrender yourself to Him. Previously you had not the slightest conception of what you now experience. It belongs to a region which is closely veiled to the natural eye, and personal experience alone can disclose its mysteries. The assurance becomes ever more and more vivid that the Man of Sorrows whom you behold is your Helper, your Saviour. You now understand Him ; you understand His invitation, "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" With unlimited confidence you cast yourself with all your cares upon Him. And what is the consequence? By the power of His mediation, and relying upon His unfailing assurance, you now look up to a reconciled God, and a *new* life springs up within you ; a life of love to God ; of freedom from the slavery of sin, of recovery from the old blindness, of heavenward progress in the strength of those most sure and blessed hopes which have been vouchsafed you. And this all-pervading change which you experience, is the work of the *Holy Spirit* in the microcosm of your heart. You have begun to keep the feast of Pentecost, and now continue unceasingly to celebrate it, for the Holy Ghost ever abides



upon you, nay, even *dwells within you*, sustaining, admonishing, and warning, stimulating to all that is good, and raising you above yourself.

All we who have been born in the lap of Christianity, and have received baptism, have been, in greater or less degree, moved and breathed upon by the Holy Ghost. Without being conscious of it, we owe much to the Spirit; especially a keener moral consciousness than that which dwells within the most enlightened heathen, and more correct ideas of man's dignity, and of his higher destiny. But this does not enable us to boast the possession of any of His gifts. He *himself* must dwell within us, and penetrate our whole inner man with His regenerating and renewing power. We must be able to say with the apostle, "*We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.*" If we have attained this, we may joyfully, on the ground of present living experience, make the other saying of the apostle our own, "*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*"

May, then, for us a true feast of Pentecost be rung in! I call upon you, my friends, to sound, by means of prayer, the chimes of salvation and of bliss. Let us from our deepest, inmost soul unite in the fervent utterance of the sacred poet:—

"Thou fiery glow of Love!  
 Let us Thy ardours prove,  
 Consume our hearts with quenchless fire!  
 Come, O Thou trackless Wind!  
 Breathe gently o'er our mind;  
 Let not the flesh to rule aspire;  
 Help us our free-born right to take,  
 The heavy yoke of sin to break,  
 And all her tempting paths forsake.



“Be it thine to stir our will;  
Our good intents fulfil;  
Be with us when we go and come;  
Deep in our spirits dwell,  
And make their inmost cell  
Thy temple pure, Thy holy home!  
Teach us to know our Lord, that we  
May call His Father ours through Thee,  
Thou pledge of glories yet to be!”

*Schmolck, 1715.—Lyra Germanica.*



## XIX.

## THE ADDRESS AT THE FEAST OF PENTECOST.

"*We are labourers together with God,*" says the apostle, (1 Cor. iii. 9,) and he is fully conscious of the high dignity which he hereby confers on himself and his fellow-disciples. How elevating is the thought to act as a co-worker with the Lord of the universe, to share in His interests, and to subserve His plan of government! This expands the whole soul, and affords an inward satisfaction complete in itself. The secret dissatisfaction which so frequently steals upon millions of mortals, and seizes their souls most forcibly when they retire from the whirl of dissipation into solitude and quiet, has in the majority of instances its real foundation in the feeling, though possibly not recognised, that they, when closely scanned, are aimless in life, or are pursuing an end unworthy of the dignity and true destiny of man. Many have this source of uneasiness aggravated by the mournful accusation of conscience, that they not only have occupied themselves with the merest trifles, but that they have striven with all their might against God: by word and deed they have destroyed where God built, and, in opposition to Him, would either have suspended His sacred purpose, or, if possible, would have frustrated it. How much are these men to be commiserated who wilfully prepare for themselves a secret hell already here on earth, whilst they might have rejoiced in a foretaste of heavenly peace had they but taken



part in the plans of the Almighty,—of which the issues are certain,—and had they but associated with *His* labourers in constructing the bulwarks of His spiritual Zion!

There is no greater cause of satisfaction than to know that we are "*labourers together with God*," however great our weakness may be. It compensates for all that we may incidentally lose; for it has associated with it that which abundantly indemnifies us—the elevating consciousness that we fill in society a position in some measure worthy of our being, and do not exist as mere parasitical plants hanging on the boughs of humanity, having to anticipate a sentence similar to that passed upon the fig-tree in the Gospel parable, which, though boasting luxuriant foliage, remained year after year without rendering the fruit which the Lord of the vineyard sought, and concerning which He said ultimately, "*Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?*"

In the following scripture we shall meet with a labourer together with God, whom we may not indeed expect to rival. But the Lord looks at the sincerity of our purpose and effort, without reference to its amount; and the results lie in His hand, not in ours.

ACTS ii. 14-41.

"But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, (saith God,) I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants, and on my handmaidens, I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles, and



wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know : him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain ; whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death : because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face ; for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved : therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad ; moreover also, my flesh shall rest in hope : because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life ; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne ; he, seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens : but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now, when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do ? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized : and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

Our feast-days and Sundays are the lights of the year, the greater and the lesser lights to rule the day and the night. How dismal would the year be without them ! How sombre and desolate our life, if, the starry heaven of these festal days did not illuminate it with its splendour ! Whitsuntide is one of the most glorious of these feasts—the memorial of a new



creation, which, though indeed spiritual, will one day obtain a splendid embodiment. The Creator is the Holy Ghost. We have already heard much of His nature and of His operations. Of the latter we shall learn more whilst meditating upon the *address* of the apostle Peter at the feast of Pentecost. Let us look first at the *contents* of it, and then at its *results*. May the precious Comforter witness to us of Himself during our meditation!

I. The scene is now laid at Jerusalem, hard by the temple. A multitude, so numerous that it extended further than the eye could reach, is in motion, excited to the utmost. In front is Peter, the fisherman, a man who in time past had greatly erred, and who at the outset had comprehended but little of His Lord's work, and of the aim of His mission. It might have puzzled him for a long while to tell why he specially had received the surname of "Cephas," that is, "Rock." But our Lord had from the beginning recognised the sturdy manliness of his character, which only needed regeneration and sanctification, and wisely adjudged him, therefore, to be the first to be exposed to the refining fire in the palace of the high priest, and, as we are accustomed to say, "to be proved there." Now his naturally decided character had received divine consecration. He steps firmly, boldly, and confidently forth from the circle of the apostles, and raises his voice like a trumpet. Look well at the texture of his speech, truly worthy of admiration as a logical masterpiece, marvellous in a man who had never had the advantages of worldly culture, but who by his dexterity in weaving it made his Master's words true—viz., "from henceforth thou shalt catch men." The Holy Ghost teaches the best system of logic and dialectics, and furnishes His heralds and interpreters, not only with the *subject* of their proclamations, but likewise with the most suitable and corresponding *form* of expression. In order to obtain a hearing, Peter commences his address



in a conciliatory strain, and, after having greeted the thousands before him as *Jewish brethren*, he introduces the speech with the request, "*Hear these words !*" You remember how he used violently to resent the least thing by which he felt himself annoyed. How at that time he could have launched forth against that band of scoffers who had dared to accuse not only himself, but all those who had been baptized with the Holy Ghost, of drunkenness. But now, however, there does not escape him one single word either of rebuke or menace. On the contrary, he is now so far master of himself, that he limits himself to repudiate the noisy, senseless imputation, by the simple remark, that it was but the third hour of the day, *i.e.*, nine o'clock in the morning, when no one would think of drinking wine. "No," says he, "drunkenness is on this occasion wholly out of the question. That which you have just witnessed is totally different. It is that which your great prophets have repeatedly and most unequivocally announced." And after having said this, he recalls the prophecy of Joel, a seer well known and highly esteemed by all the Israelites: "*It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Holy Spirit upon all flesh,*" &c.

The term latter, or "*last days*," as used in Scripture, means the closing period of the kingdom of God upon earth, and of the present dispensation. According to the views and representations developed in Scripture, this latter dispensation commences with Christ's appearance, and especially upon the completion of His work of redemption, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Whitsuntide; because after that the longing of the world was set at rest by Christ's advent, provided it will appropriate that which has been done and accomplished for it. Again, this latter dispensation is brought to its close by the second coming of Christ to judgment; and in the creation of a new heaven and a new



earth, "*these latter and last days*" have already extended through a cycle of eighteen centuries, and that which awaits mankind in its future experience will absorb the interval between the present time and its end. Nothing essentially new will ever again happen under the sun; all that we have in prospect, that is either great or glorious, is but the development and sequence of that which is already in progress. The kingdom of God has been established once for all, and is now, by strife and victory, only becoming more and more fully developed until it shall attain its final completion.

Thus in the Bible-perspective, the beginning and the end, are often brought into juxtaposition, even though thousands of years may lie between them. Both the prophet Joel and the apostle Peter, when announcing the miracle at the feast of Pentecost, connect with it allusions to the "*great and terrible day of the Lord*," when, amidst wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath, with other terrific phenomena, final judgment will be pronounced on man.

When Peter had declared to the people, "That which you now see and hear is what was foretold by the prophet Joel," he literally repeats the words of this prophet: "*And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.*" And to these words, which lead all to expect in their share of the promised divine blessing, together with the removal of all barriers and walls of partition, whether of age or condition, perfect equality likewise, the prophet adds, now that the future lies unveiled before his spiritual vision, the following fearful words: "*And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of*



*smoke: the sun shall be turned' into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come."* Deeply agitated, the surrounding crowd listen to these prophetic words. But the speaker does not conceal from them that which is added to the prophetic, but at the right moment exclaims, with heightened emphasis, "*And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*"

In this last passage, Peter now extends the field of his operations. His hearers are naturally just about to inquire, "Who is the Lord whose name we must invoke to escape condemnation?" But the speaker still judiciously withholds a direct answer to this question, and leaves it to themselves to discover who the Lord is, who alone can assure them against the terrors of judgment. He contents himself at first with reminding them of the marvellous life of Jesus of Nazareth, of which they had been to some extent eye-witnesses, and presses upon them to consider whether it would have been possible for Him to perform the signs and wonders which He did unless the Almighty had been with Him. The listeners now begin to think whether Jesus be really the Lord upon whom they should call. Then again, he makes another step towards his goal, reminding them at first of the bloody end of this mysterious Personage whom they had seen walking in their midst. But he proceeds most carefully with his work; he avoids everything that might possibly exasperate them, and is immediately intent upon removing the scandal which was, as far as they were concerned, involved in the terrible issue of our Lord's life, and to meet the doubt whether one, who terminated His career in such a mode, could possibly be the Lord of heaven. He says, "*Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.*" Thus the heavy accusations raised



in these words against the Jews are not without extenuation, though still leaving the sting rankling in their consciences. For it must constantly have recurred to them to say, "We, we are they who murdered Him." At the same time, the thought must have obtruded itself upon them, that God must inevitably have regarded the sufferings and death of Jesus as requisite and necessary to the completion of His (the Father's) purpose in the mission of His Son. And let it not be here unnoted with what clearness the same disciple, who on a former occasion would violently have obstructed his Master's progress to Jerusalem and the cross, now apprehends the high importance of the "*cross of Christ*." Who wrought this in him? who initiated him all at once into the great mystery, but precisely that Holy Spirit who now led him into all truth?

The multitude, becoming every moment more thoughtful, listen with increasing attention to the speaker, and it possibly occurred to many of them to think *that* of him which was said of his superior, though his speech was most simple, and totally destitute of oratorical pretension, still it was that of "*one having authority, and not as the scribes*." Peter proceeds: "*This man approved of God was crucified and slain; but the wicked who nailed him to the cross, have not, however, attained their end, God hath raised him up, having loosed the pains of death*." How this declaration must have astonished the multitude! "Really raised to life again?" they may have secretly asked themselves; "is this an ascertained fact? But if He were the man from God, why was it necessary that He should have yielded to death at all, and have been miraculously restored to life?" Whilst thoughts and questions like these were passing through their minds, I think many a passage in the old prophecies must have flashed across their memory whose uniform tenor indicated that the future Messiah should "*make His soul an offering for sin*,"



and then that by God He should be taken from judgment, and raised on high. But that which presented itself to them as dim and fleeting, was rendered definite and fixed by Peter's selection of some of those prophetic passages, particularly those in the Psalms which refer to the Messiah ; and he lays special stress on that passage in which the royal Psalmist prophesies concerning the great *One that was to come*, whom he calls "*his Lord*," who should indeed die, but neither see corruption nor remain in the grave, but rise again in triumphant glory. The excitement of his hearers constantly increases. Presently the speaker, raising his voice, continues : " Yes, *it was concerning Jesus of Nazareth* that your king, David, moved by the Spirit of God, prophesied in those Psalms. Jesus obviously bears all the marks ascribed to him there, for *he died, and God hath raised him again* ; whereof we are all witnesses." The great boldness and enthusiasm with which Peter spake, and which all the other disciples manifested before the people, were adequate evidence that their belief in the resurrection of their Master was no mere conceit, but rested on a basis as firm as a rock. There was written upon the beaming countenances of these men, in characters that all could read, that He who had been dead was really alive again, and had the keys of death and hell.

" And the man whom ye would not recognise," adds this Pentecostal preacher, " is more than risen. '*He is raised by the right hand of God* ;' and this also in accordance with the prophecies of David, who says, in Psalm cx. : '*The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies my footstool.*' " But did this sublime declaration really refer to Jesus ? Peter says, " Is it not perfectly obvious to you, that it is applicable to none but Him ? Here is the practical proof of it ! *Now He is exalted to sit at the right hand of God*," cries the apostle to the multitude before him, who were excited to the utmost ; and proceeds, "*and having*



*received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.*" The assembled multitude are not only amazed, but terrified. What can they further object to this conclusive proof that Jesus is the Lord of heaven, the promised Messiah? Truly He is the Lord; it must be He whom God purposed to send into the world as its Saviour. And how had He been treated? In spirit they see themselves already judged, and made His footstool. Their thoughts conflict within them like an armed host, accusing and excusing them. Peter has the draught which he so earnestly implored, already in his net, and all that now remains to be done is to draw the net together over them. It is done. "Therefore," he continues, "*let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye*" (and now he utters the plain and simple truth, which must pierce their very hearts) "*have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*"

Such is Peter's Pentecostal sermon, as striking as it is concise, as pithy as it is simple, and as enlightened as it is convincing. Is it not in itself a practical proof of the advent of the Holy Ghost?

II. But the operation and result of Peter's sermon afford a still more evident proof of this. Observe the emotion which pervades the crowd; the expression of intense apprehension on all countenances. "*Now when they heard this,*" continues the narrative, "*they were pricked in their heart.*" It shook the very foundations of their being; it utterly prostrated them by depicting the whole magnitude of their blood-guiltiness; it made them tremble and shudder at the thought of His tribunal who has said, "*Vengeance is mine, I will repay.*" Filled with concern, and panting for deliverance and salvation, they cry to Peter and his fellow-apostles, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" And what answer? Concise in its terms, but again testifying to the divine illu-



mination of the speaker, for he exhausted the whole *scheme of salvation* in a few syllables: "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you and your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*" And much that is not related did Peter add to this, concluding with the exhortation: "*Save yourselves from this untoward generation,*" i.e., from the multitude, who obstinately close their heart against belief, and will not see the light, although it be reflected upon them. And they are willing to be saved. Three thousand joyfully accept the word, and are baptized, thereby devoting themselves soul and body to the Lord Jesus as their true Saviour and only Mediator and Redeemer. At one cast of the gospel net three thousand souls are taken, and quickened with the Spirit from on high! O Peter! how perfectly true were our Lord's words, when He gave thee the assurance that thou shouldst become a "*fisher of men!*"

But what had really occurred to those three thousand on the great day of Pentecost? A generation were born again; a race of essentially renewed individuals; new not indeed as to the body, but in their minds and hearts; perfect, though not at once so, in their development; but the faculty was there of becoming so, and a germ involving the pledge of a most glorious development. The *Church of Christ* was founded. Had you but been able to look into the inmost soul of those three thousand, you would indeed be astonished at the transformation which took place so suddenly within them. The gulf lying between them and even the most noble of those who are still in a state of nature is vast and boundless. They now look at everything from a totally different stand-point from the world; for they regard everything as having reference to God, His government and His



kingdom. They measure everything by a totally different standard from that previously employed by them ; for now their only standard is *God's Word*. All that they now undertake, is carried out differently ; for the love of Christ constrains and guides them. Even in rejoicing, their motives for doing so differ from those of the world, for, resting on the bosom of His grace, they joy in a disburdened, free, and happy conscience. And how differently do they bear and suffer, knowing that they drink only the cup mixed, prepared for them by their God, in all kindness of purpose and in the exercise of a wise providence ; and thus they also love differently : for they love *in God*, who will also have compassion on their brethren. They now aim at other ends : their objects are high—nothing less than holiness, likeness to God, and communion with Him. The life they lead is unto the Lord. They cast all that gives them concern upon God. Though the world may not see it, their walk and conversation is already in heaven. With silent joy they listen to the music of the other world ringing in their ears ; and death, when he beckons to them holds out a crown of glory. Such were the Pentecostal converts, having indeed to fight whilst here below, but their warfare is a spiritual one. Such are they who are new created by God's Holy Spirit : the sanctified, who though as yet disguised, are, in the inmost features of their character already transformed into the image of Christ. Were the world filled with such men, then, as you must perceive, peace would dwell on earth, and earth would again be a paradise. And we may all become such, and must do so, would we secure our souls and be assured of our future. The way to this end has been pointed out to us ; and even if it had not been so before, it is disclosed to us in the narrative. *Baptized* with water we are indeed already. With many of us, however, baptism is only borne, as are the royal arms by deserters upon their epaulets, only



to manifest their shame and condemnation. By deciding to surrender our hearts unconditionally to Jesus Christ, let us allow the baptism which we once received to become truth. The Moral Ruler of the world who came and dwelt amongst us on the day of Pentecost will then immediately mould us into members of His kingdom: the effect of which will assuredly be to enable us, at least in some degree, to say confidently with the apostle: "*But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*" May the Lord in His great mercy help us all to attain this! He will do it if our hearts be attuned to tones as pure and lovely as those found in the sacred song of our old poet Tersteegen:—

"O fount, O Spirit, who dost take and show  
 Things of the Son to us—who crystal clear  
 From God's throne and the Lamb's dost ceaseless flow  
 Into the quiet hearts that seek Thee here—  
 I open wide my mouth, and thirsting sink  
 Beside thy stream, its living waves to drink.

"*I give myself to Thee, to Thee alone,*  
 From all else sunder'd, Thou art ever near;  
 The creature and myself I all disown,  
 Trusting with inmost faith that God is here!  
 O God, O Spirit, Light of life, we see  
 None ever wait in vain who wait for Thee."

*Tersteegen, 1731.—Lyra Germanica.*



## XX.

## THE PENTECOSTAL COMFORTER.

*"I tell you the truth ; it is expedient for you that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."* Thus did our Lord (John xvi. 7) address His disciples, when their hearts were filled with sorrow at the intimation He had just given of His approaching departure. Since the Lord of heaven says, *"It is expedient for you,"* and couples with it the asseveration, *"I tell you the truth,"* that must, indeed, be something great and glorious which He holds forth in prospect to them. And truly nothing more precious could have been promised them than the sending of the Holy Ghost. Were the Holy Spirit here represented but as *"He who should convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment,"* that would suffice to indicate His preliminary work ; which is simply restricted to make known the channels by which the streams of salvation, comfort, and peace, are conveyed to man, and with which He comes to bless humanity. Whilst engaged in this meditation, may the Lord deign to revive us with plenteous draughts from these streams ! And He will do so if He but find us amongst those who thirst for them, and to whom the invitation has gone forth from the lips of the Most High : *"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."*



## ACTS ii. 16-18.

"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, (saith God,) I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh : and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams : and on my servants, and on my handmaidens, I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy."

However charming the word Whitsuntide may strike upon the ear, because the exhilarating image of spring, decked in all her bridal attire, is associated with this festival, still it is difficult to speak intelligibly of the importance of the holy day of Pentecost to a general modern assembly. But why is it so? Because, alas! so little of the Holy Spirit is to be found in the churches, that it remains but too true which the apostle said, "The natural man receiveth *not* the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are *spiritually discerned*." Is it then most advisable to say *nothing* at Whitsuntide of the signification of this festival? By no means! For, in the first place, the Holy Ghost *avails Himself* of the *preached word* to open the understanding of the hearers with reference to their own character, provided He finds in them the least trace of susceptibility for heavenly things; and, moreover, there can scarcely fail to be individuals who are *first-fruits* of the Spirit in *any* Christian assembly. I hope, then, that it will be the desire of all of you, that the import of this great festival, especially its consolatory feature, may present itself to you in a more ample manner than it ever previously did, whilst, guided by the prophetic passage quoted by Peter, I take a rapid glance at that *new period* of the kingdom of God which dates from that marvellous day. What will you then be enabled to perceive? In the first place, you will see *the frontiers of the divine kingdom extended to the ends of the earth*; secondly, *the Holy Ghost appointed to remould*



*the world ; thirdly, the whole human race assigned to Him for exaltation in heaven ; fourthly, a new family tie formed by Him amongst the children of Adam ; and finally, the foundation of a general priesthood of believers.*

Let us fix our attention for a while on each of these subjects ; and may the witness of the Spirit of truth not fail us whilst so engaged !

I. I do not need first to depict the stirring scene in which Peter addresses to us the prophetic words which we have just heard from the book of Joel as having been just then *fulfilled*, as far, at least, as their principal meaning was concerned. You are already, in thought, in the midst of that grand scene, and you share the astonishment of the thousands assembled on Mount Zion, at the miraculous signs of the mysterious "*mighty rushing wind*," the cloven tongues of flame on the heads of the hundred and twenty disciples who were baptized with the Holy Ghost, as well as at the foreign languages which they spake, and at the marvellous unction and power with which you suddenly hear those poor fishermen, publicans, and sailors, declare the wonderful works of God their Saviour. The greatest indignation seizes you, that at the time when all around burst forth into an exclamation of most intense amazement, "What meaneth this?" a band of disorderly fellows should have vented the vulgarity of their minds in mockery, saying, "*These men are full of new wine.*" And how your reverence for those holy and inspired men increases when you hear one from among them indignantly, but with calm composure, repudiate the disgraceful accusation, and explain quietly and clearly to the assembled multitude the true meaning of what they see and hear, saying, "*This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel : Thus saith God, It shall come to pass in the last days,*" (*i.e.*, in the period of the completion of God's kingdom, which began with the day of Pentecost,) "*I will pour out of*



*my Spirit upon all flesh.*" Do you hear?—"upon all flesh!" You have now the first novelty which is introduced here. Up to that time, the limits of God's kingdom did not extend beyond those of the *one* chosen people. Divine revelation was made to Israel alone, and upon the Jews only did the Holy Ghost exercise His moulding and training agency. God allowed all other nations, as it is said in the Psalms, "*to go their own ways.*" In them, mankind were first to try their *own* strength, and thus to prove, as it were, how far they were able to advance in knowledge of the truth and self-improvement. For thousands of years they strove—and who will deny that, despite their degeneracy, they succeeded?—I might say, in presenting themselves, in more than *one* respect, and especially in works of mind and genius, as a race of *fallen kings*. By which of our men renowned for earthly wisdom has the heathen Plato been surpassed? By which of our politicians the heathen Pericles? By which of our orators, the heathen Demosthenes? By which of our artists, the heathen Phidias? By which of our poets, the heathens Homer and Sophocles? By none. And nevertheless, those nations that had made the greatest progress, and were the most civilised, had shewn themselves so incapable of raising themselves to any extent from their *religious and moral* decay, that at the time of the eventful day of Pentecost, all the nations of the world, with the exception of the Jews, were on the verge of total moral corruption and dissolution. Their misery cried to heaven. But it was right and necessary that they should first be made sensible of their need of salvation and help, in order that the intended redemption of the world should not find all hearts entirely closed against it. The needed assistance came. On the day of Pentecost, the Lord God removed the barriers that encircled Israel, and extended the limits of His kingdom from pole to pole. Henceforth the unsealed fountain of life should



send its streams into all lands, making even the deserts to bloom. This has happened, and will come to pass again ; and our anxiety for the future of the world and of our race is so far dissipated, since we know that whoever *wills* not to remain in death, may live.

II. Let us hear something more concerning the compassionate purpose of our God. "*I will pour out,*" says He in His promise, "*of my Spirit upon all flesh.*" How consolatory does this sound ! And yet it seems as though He here only promised to impart *isolated* spiritual gifts. The personality of the Holy Spirit is less apparent. But, on the other hand, we know well how strongly it is emphasised in other passages of Holy Scripture. I do not need to remind you again either of the passage in John xiv. : "*I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter ;*" or of His word—"The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you ;" or of the passage in John xvi. : "*Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth ;*" or of the other one—"He shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak : and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." Just as little occasion have I to recall well-known passages in the epistles in which the Holy Ghost is most unequivocally distinguished from the Father and the Son, where operations and works purely personal in their character are ascribed to Him, and the same dignity and honours are attributed to Him which are due to the Father and the Son. If divine revelation did not most explicitly represent the Holy Ghost as a being, a personality equal to God, how could the Christian Church have made the triple personality of the Godhead (if I may make use of



this expression) the very foundation of Christianity? It is indeed a matter of faith. But we are not required to believe anything which we cannot directly perceive in the way of our own personal *experience*. Enough that after Christ had fulfilled His great work of atonement, the Holy Ghost—who, exercising creative power, now moves over the wilderness and desert of the *moral* world, as He did in the beginning of days over the waters of the earth, which was still without form and void—has come down to us in order, in Christ's name, to occupy Himself in the exalted office of spiritually moulding and creating degenerate man anew. What a consolatory thought this is! We know that *another* spirit than the Holy Ghost likewise rules upon earth, and that he too has selected man as the material, operating upon which, he strives to reproduce himself and his character. He likewise has his *personality*; true it is, he is but a *creature*; but armed with mighty power, and endowed with great cunning and subtlety. He is the *fallen morning star*, once the most distinguished of all spirits which proceeded from the hand of God; now, however, God's sworn enemy, and the most bitter opponent of the kingdom of God, and of all that is good. His dominion is so extended and so great, that the Scripture concedes to him not only the title of "*prince*," but even calls him the "*god of this world*." Satan is his name. What would become of us, if we stood alone opposed to him, and to his legions of angels, thrown back upon our own defensive powers? But, praised be God! a *mightier One* now contends with him, who laughs his power and his machinations to scorn, and who will infallibly keep the field. The Spirit of Pentecost, this communicating Agent of heavenly powers to us mortals, this Creator of life and Liberator from bonds, undertook, from the day of Pentecost, to guide, educate, and instruct the whole human race. What can we desire more? What



hopes may we not cherish with reference to the further development of our race? Acting upon fallen human nature, He will know how to make something to the glory of God! Whitsuntide inspires courage. Though for a while falsehood, crime, and ungodliness cover the earth as waters cover the bed of the sea, the day of Pentecost prevents despair and apprehension. Taken collectively, we are not going down hill, but, on the contrary, are rising higher. Jerusalem is being built. There shall be a new earth as well as a new heaven in which righteousness shall dwell. Nothing is more certain than this. The rule of the Spirit of Pentecost assuredly guarantees it to us.

III. "I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh." Why does the Lord thus express Himself in His promise? Partly in order to intimate the extensive sphere of the operations of the Holy Ghost at the time of the new covenant; partly in order to indicate that, as the rain and dew refresh the vegetable world, so the Spirit from above will penetrate man's whole nature, vivifying and transforming him. We already know that the Holy Ghost operates differently under the new covenant from what He did under the old. Your attention has been already directed to the difference between His operations subsequent to the feast of Pentecost, and those which were wrought prior to that day. You will admit that, during the legal dispensation, such characters were never brought under your observation, (subsequent to Pentecost,) as you discover in a John, in a Peter, or in a Paul, who were so wholly dead to the suggestions of the old man, in whom holiness pervaded their being to its very core, and whose walk and conversation were already in heaven. The Holy Spirit, moreover, works *by means of the Word*, and never *without it*. His primary workings are indeed of a painful character. He begins His work by dispelling many favourite delusions in which we may have involved



ourselves. Acting as guardian, before His wards are aware of it, the "good God" in whom they had implicitly looked for comfort is transformed into a thrice-holy majesty, the much-loved seat of the universal Father into a dread tribunal, glowing with fiery flames, and His "beautiful heaven" into a holy of holies to which only the consecrated and righteous may obtain admittance; His law, which they thought so easy to fulfil, becomes a most relentless accuser, if violated but in one point, and that whether it be by overt act, or only by latent desire or inclination. A burning and shining light, such as they have never heretofore seen, then rises before them, disclosing their real state. Their peace of mind is gone. They tremble at the thought of the day of account. But now the Spirit continues His work within them; for He glorifies Christ in them, revealing the treasures of compassion which lie concealed in Him, teaching them to believe in the propitiatory power of His blood, and bearing testimony with their spirits that they also are children of God through the mediation of their everlasting High Priest. And, together with peace in believing, He inspires love in the heart, filial love to God the Lord, and to all that is God's; and with love He implants hope, which enables them to see the world, death, and the grave, placed beneath their feet, and soaring on eagle's wings far above the heights of earth, joyfully to attain that abode which is prepared for them on high. Thus they journey, God's pilgrims and His citizens, cheerfully performing what is required in the service of the Lord, and happy in the blissful prospects which they see disclosed before them. The Holy Ghost transforms all the poor children of Adam who confidently submit themselves to His care, into *such* men, living to the Lord; and He never more forsakes them, but helps their weakness, arms them for the fight that shall issue in victory, against all the powers of darkness, expands their heart and gives enlargement and



fervency in prayer, and renders them unceasingly the most splendid services and powerful assistance, by a thousand secret modes, instructions, warnings, and intimations, often before they are aware. Such is the *transformation* which the Pentecostal Spirit imparts to those who are under His guardianship here on earth.

IV. But to whom does the Spirit thus reveal Himself? In the days of the old covenant he generally held intercourse only with the pillars and dignitaries in God's kingdom, enlightening them, and delivering His messages to them. Since His entry into the world at Pentecost, however, He has designed His loving care indiscriminately for *all* sinners, just as the Mediator's blood was shed for all. The declaration of the prophet Joel must have struck the ears of the ancients with wonder: "*Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit.*" This did not mean indeed, They shall all receive direct revelations from God; its signification was rather this: The Spirit will subject them all to His operations, and according to His purpose, make them partakers of a new life. And we now see this fulfilled. Old and young, learned and unlearned, high and low, masters and servants, and maidens too, experience a new birth, which influences their mind, temper, and understanding, their heart and their conversation; the external distinctions of superior and inferior continue in the meanwhile, such being God's will and ordinance; but they are *inwardly*, and with reference to the *Spirit*, upon a perfect equality as to rank and training. A nobility is instituted, novel in its kind, ranking immeasurably higher than one proceeding from mere birth and descent. I meet men amongst those who have been baptized in the Spirit, who go about in working-men's dress, "who, if we speak of



deeds, would be found to be men who have overcome the world—who, as to education, judge all the things of this world immeasurably more soundly and profoundly than thousands of learned men—who, as to their minds, possess much deeper conceptions than those of the greatest philosophers, where these latter have but drawn from the resources of their own minds—and who, as to morals, may boast that they exhibit a tact much finer and more delicate than any dictated by a mere worldly system of fashions, inasmuch as theirs is peculiarly their own, and not borrowed from others. He who gives free scope to the Holy Spirit will be raised by Him to a degree of general moral refinement to which no human art or science can possibly elevate him. I know men in the highest rank of society who, because they share in the Holy Spirit, feel themselves more closely, nearly, and intimately connected with their converted servants, than with their equals, in a worldly point of view, in culture and rank. And this feeling of relationship is maintained among all genuine children of the Spirit. Thus the Holy Spirit forms a *new family tie* among the children of Adam, which will ever extend further and further, until at length it shall embrace all mankind as one flock under one *Shepherd*. “*For by one Spirit,*” says the apostle, (1 Cor. xii. 13,) comprehending all true believers with himself in one body, “*are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Greeks, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit;*” and in Gal. iii. 28: “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*”

V. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are manifold. They are not *all* necessary to salvation. Some of them, such as the ability to preach, the qualifications of a pastor, of church government, and the like, only serve to the perfecting of the



kingdom of God. Under the old covenant these were associated with particular offices. The Spirit now distributes these to such in the Church of Christ as He wills; "*But the manifestation of the Spirit is given,*" says the apostle, "*to every man to profit withal;*" and the "*universal priesthood*" of believers is based upon this fact, without detriment to the ordinances and offices established by God in the Church, nay, accommodating and making themselves subject to them, they are all called, as endowed each severally according to the measure of His gift, to co-operate in the perfecting of the kingdom of God. There is not one amongst them who is not authorised, and to whom it is not likewise conceded to appear before the throne of God with suitable intercession for others; to win souls to the Lord by words mighty to convince, plain and simple though they be; and to light the way to the divine havens of refuge, to those who have gone astray, and have wandered from the right path, by the quiet shining light of their own example. "*He that believeth on me,*" saith our Lord, "*out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*" What a promise is this! True believers are not only blessed *themselves*, but, wherever they are, they are *springs of blessing* for all around them, which flow unceasingly, and yet are never exhausted, so that, whether silent or speaking, at rest or in action, they are ever exerting an influence, now awakening, now quickening, now enlightening, and now calming and solacing. They are as "*trees planted by the rivers of water, whose leaves shall not wither,*" nay, "*serve for the healing of the nations.*" But all this is through the Holy Spirit, who, dwelling in them, has chosen them to be His vessels and His instruments. If *we*, then, my friends, have not yet assumed this priestly character, there is no reason why we might not have done so, and that long ago. We are all called thereto. The Divine Comforter, with His wondrous unction, has long stood at the door



of our hearts. Oh that we would but admit Him, and grant Him free and unbounded scope for His operations ! our moral atmosphere would soon be filled with Divine quickening and saving powers ; and even though "*lightnings and thunders and voices*" should not proceed from us, our whole appearance would breathe a something which would revive the withered, refresh the weary, and reanimate the sick. Oh, when will it come to pass that the prevailing want of spirituality shall cease from amongst us, when there shall be an efficacious remedy for our drooping faith, and that the Divine creative fiat shall resound to awaken the dead by whom we are encompassed : "*Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live ?*" When shall we be able to say of our churches : "*Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth ; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land ?*" It would soon come to pass indeed, if our souls did but *really thirst* for it, and if the holy flame of prayer, which so delightfully and fervently meets us in the sacred song, were never extinguished on the altar of our hearts :—

" O Holy Ghost ! Thou fire divine !  
From highest heaven on us down shine.  
Comforter, be Thy comfort mine !  
Oh, cleanse our souls from sinful stain,  
O'er desert hearts Thy blessing rain,  
And heal the wounded from their pain.  
And may we live in holiness,  
And find in death our happiness,  
And dwell with Thee in lasting bliss ! "

*Lyra Germanica.*



## XXI.

## THE PENTECOSTAL COMMUNITY.

IN Ps. xxv. 16, David breaks forth thus, "*I am desolate!*" In one sense it was truth, in another it was not so. He felt desolate; but our feelings deceive us thousands of times. He was never deserted for a moment. The Lord was with him even when concealed "*behind the wall.*" "*I am desolate!*" This is a lamentation that is heard more frequently than any other in the "*tabernacles of the righteous.*" But we should not be too hasty. Let us remember that such a complaint makes God a liar, for He has said: "*The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him;*" and Jesus a liar, for He saith, "*Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.*" And as this latter is the Alpha, so likewise is He the Omega, and as the *first*, so likewise is He the *last*. Many complain, in contemplation of the guidings in Providence, of the path in which they are constrained to go, "*I am desolate!*" But were it really a fact, that the Lord is leading thee by a way trodden by no second individual, would that be a misfortune? I think, if *He* but lead us, that ought to be enough for us. "*Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? and the clay to his potter, What makest thou?*" And no one can say with truth, in reference to the path by which he is led, "*I am desolate!*" Many travel the same road, though we are not aware of it. Search Scripture, and



you will certainly find some one *there*, and upon closer survey you will find amongst your fellow-pilgrims, some in whose experience you may recognise your own. And it is undoubtedly consolatory and encouraging to meet brethren amongst the saints of God, whose experience in following the Lord agrees with ours. "I am desolate!" exclaims many a one with reference to the faith which he confesses, and according to which he lives. I believe things, thinks he, which millions of my fellow-men have long since rejected as idle tales, such as (amongst others) Christ's *Godhead*, *redemption* through Christ's blood, His *miracles*, and signs. And in connexion with such a perception arises the doubt *whether he* be the *only one* that is in the right, and whether all those millions be in the wrong. O thou who art tormented by such a doubt, know that assuredly those millions err, and that thou, though thou wert alone in thy belief, art right, for thy foundation is the *Word of God*. But thou lookest at the matter far too gloomily when thou supposest that there are but so few who hold thy faith. The number of those who have not bowed the knee to Baal is innumera- bly greater than thou of "little faith" dost imagine. And, moreover, cease to judge the race of mortals who surround thee to be the *whole* world of intelligent beings, and this earth, but as the drop of a bucket, as God's *whole* universe. Left up thine eyes and see whether thou art really desolate. Look at the ten thousand times ten thousand standing before the throne of the Almighty, and at the multitude of just men made perfect, whom no man can number, in white robes and with golden harps in their hands. These are thy fellow-believers who bear their testimony to thy faith, and who, interceding for thee and for thy cause, pray day and night, and adoringly cry, "*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive honour and glory and blessing for ever and ever!*" But, as we have said, there are numbers here now



who hold the same faith, who serve the same Lord, who walk the same path, and who fight and suffer with thee, and who, unknown to thee, bear thee upon prayerful hearts. And be assured they are amongst the very noblest who breathe upon earth, they are the light and the salt of the world. Believe in the "*fellowship of saints*." Thou thinkest, "Oh, would that there were such a church somewhere upon earth, as that first at Jerusalem baptized by the Holy Spirit!" Well, *that* also has not yet disappeared. And we are now just about to treat of it.

## ACTS ii. 42-47.

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

Oh what a charming spectacle is that presented to us, and found not in the ideal world of poesy, but in reality! Christianity recognises in it the portrait of her spiritual youth. It was thus that she looked when brought into life by the creative breath of the holy Spirit as the Pentecostal Church. Does she still recognise herself in this portrait, or does she shrink back from the mirror, blushing and confused? I do not say that this Church has disappeared from the world. Nay, this lovely temple might again be reconstructed in our day, though the living stones of which it would be composed would be found far asunder. The *Christian Church*, however, is no longer this temple, and assuredly scarce any church could be found which might compare with that *primary one* at Jerusalem. This latter



is and remains a *type and pattern* upon which every subsequent church has to be moulded. It must, therefore, be of the highest interest for us to devote our intelligent consideration to the appearance of the Church of Christ in its original and typical constitution. Let us look upon that Church, then, in the first place, *in its positive characteristic features*; and in the next, *in its operation upon the world surrounding it*. May the beautiful picture excite us to more earnest emulation! May the Lord bless our meditations!

I. You know the constitution of the Church which is now brought before us. Who would have thought that so noble a production could have been formed out of such crude and refractory materials as was the Israel of that time. You saw the well-known vision of the prophet Ezekiel realised on the day of Pentecost. A field covered with the bones of the spiritually dead lay before you. And to these the summons issued, "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." Peter then prophesied to them in the name of the Lord. Then began a noise and shaking on the wide and desolate field; and when the "wind"—i.e., the Holy Ghost—was commanded to "*Come and breathe upon these slain, that they might live,*" breath came into them, and they rose, and lived; and sinews and flesh grew upon them, and they acquired a form. And there was an exceeding great army of them: three thousand in number. This was a miracle indeed of which the meaning was most consolatory and rich in promise! After the Spirit has once made an entrance, how quickly does He effect the most surprising and glorious transformation, even in the most uncouth and perverse nations! How this cheers our prospect for this world and quickens our hope for the future! The three thousand proselytes immediately joined themselves, as members of one body, to the believers who were already in Jerusalem; and thus, resplendent in all the living freshness of youthful



beauty, the first *Christian church* stood forth, the model for all those which should ever afterwards be formed. This community is minutely described to us in all its essential characteristics. We hear of their *faith*, of their *fellowship*, of their *heavenly frame of mind*, of their *bold confession*, and of the *prevailing temper and disposition of the members*.

"*They continued*," thus we read, in the first place, "*in the apostles' doctrine*." Happy indeed were they to have been able to cultivate the field of their Christian knowledge under the immediate direction of the holy apostles! We, however, are not much less highly favoured. That which was communicated and disclosed to them orally, we have before us in the text of the apostolic epistles. But the belief of the first Christians in the doctrine of the apostles is highly important to us. It throws a great weight into the balance of our own convictions. The apostles preached to them that which is now delivered in their writings to us,—the divinity of Jesus Christ, the all-sufficiency of His mediation, justification by grace on the ground of His merits, and all that stands connected with the doctrines of grace. The believers in the apostolic message opened their hearts, utterly divested of all suspicion, to the Christ to whom they were now directed in all their difficulties—the majority of them having known Him whilst living and moving bodily in their midst. This circumstance places it beyond doubt that they had themselves received impressions concerning His person in perfect harmony with those great and glorious things which they now learned of Him, and with the design of His mission; the one truly confirmed the other. It would occur to them, "Why should not we consider the sublime things which you, His confidants, proclaim to us concerning the nature, the dignity, and the works of the Son of Man, as worthy of all acceptance? His whole deportment tended to prove that He was precisely such a one as you have depicted Him,



and that He really would accomplish great and marvellous things. *We, moreover, saw His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth!*" But the intimate convictions which you, the contemporaries of Jesus, the eye and ear witnesses of both His deeds and words have formed, must materially contribute for ever to dissipate all remaining scruples in ourselves. Your faith sustains ours—nay, is even calculated to remove every prop, stay, and pretext for unbelief.

*The fellowship of the first Christians* has become celebrated. The word in the original has a twofold application. It betokens mutual help in the distribution of earthly gifts, and in the exchange of spiritual ones; and it likewise means intimate fellowship, and hearty interchange of sincerely reciprocated affection. The devil had not then sown the seeds of bickering and strife in the field of the Church which now, alas! flourish so luxuriantly. Possibly even then diversity of views and apprehensions may have been manifested amongst Christians. But they were perfectly agreed in all fundamental articles—on those, for instance, concerning the Divine yet human person of the Redeemer, His work of atonement as the sole ground of acceptance with God, salvation by faith alone,—faith, however, which does not remain fruitless, but whose inevitable consequence is sanctity of life,—the sacraments as priceless divine means of grace and salvation;—and this agreement, founded on common experience both of heart and life, was ever growing more deeply rooted, and proved more than adequate for the foundation of the most sincere and endeared relations between them. They knew that they were all bought with *one* blood, quickened by *one* Spirit, and called to *one* inheritance of the "*saints in light*." How could they but have felt as a family most intimately connected, associated for eternity, whose head was their exalted and glorified Master?



And they gave practical and symbolical expression to this feeling by frequently *breaking bread* in each other's houses and tents, doing so in small companies composed of different members; taking their simple meal together, and thus recalling the sacred table at which our Lord supped with His disciples. This, of course, took place after the heat and burden of the day, for we are not to imagine that they were idlers. You know how the disciples, after the resurrection of our Lord, returned to their nets during the short time they had to wait; and again, how Paul afterwards, though preaching during the day, passed part of the night at the loom in order to earn his own bread. Their Lord, indeed, was no longer present at these social family repasts. But though not visibly with them, He was nevertheless essentially so, in the sweet peace, the inward heavenly joy, and the brotherly love, which He had shed abroad in their hearts. And He was still more intimately present with them in the significant solemnity which was ever united to these love-feasts, which was, indeed, the real aim of these meetings at the board,—I mean, in the communion which, in His absence, so fully indemnified them for the loss of His presence,—in the enjoyment of the Lord's Supper, the elements of which had been blessed by Him himself,—the consecrated bread and wine, those seals of His grace, those pledges of His personal presence. How far were they elevated above the heights of earth, and how did they experience the truth of His promise, "*Where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them!*"

And do not marvel when it is further related concerning the members of this church, that they "*had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.*" The feeling of Christian fellowship was in them so powerful, that they naturally considered the worldly goods which had fallen to



the lot of any as belonging also to the poor brethren who formed the greater part of the community ; and their frame of mind was so heavenly, that their appreciation of the gracious spiritual gifts which they had attained through Christ was such as to make all earthly property appear unworthy of notice. Their hearts were entirely detached from it. But you are by no means to consider that this "*having all things common*" was imposed as law, or as an ordinance embodied in their ecclesiastical regulations. Each *freely* gave, and as *freely* retained, that which his own heart dictated. Neither did they purpose to equalise the disparity in their possessions in an external and mechanical manner. We are, on the contrary, specially informed that they parted them according as "*every man had need,*"—i.e., at the time and to the extent which his necessities demanded. Nor would we have you less attentively observe that no one *laid claim*, no one *demand*ed, but every proprietor felt self-constrained to *impart* to the brethren ; so that this exercise of active love formed a decided contrast to that which we are now accustomed to term *communion*. Moreover, finally, the peculiar mode and style in which the enthusiastic love of the primitive Christians actively demonstrated itself was not intended to serve as a prescribed legal precedent for all successive Christian churches. Besides, we nowhere find this style of beneficence exercised subsequently in the apostolic churches. But the spirit which, from a free, self-emanating impulse, invested that form at Jerusalem, is, and remains, the indispensable stamp of Christianity to this hour. We are to emulate the first Christians in sincere, practical, and self-denying cheerful *brotherly love* ; and if we come short of their example on this point, nothing is more certain than that their faith and heavenly-mindedness differed in some respects from ours.

It was an imperative necessity with them to *confess* the



faith, in which they were so happy, aloud to the whole world ; and that which ranked next in point of urgency was to put it in action. It was not sufficient for them to pour forth their whole soul before the Lord in the privacy of the chamber, which they did incessantly, but they felt constrained likewise to testify aloud of Him who was to them their all in all, and this they did either to those who were as yet uninformed of our Lord, or to those who were unwilling to know Him. Following the custom of the more pious among their nation, they engaged daily in united prayer, but in *their instance* they offered prayer in the *name of Jesus*, to whom, as to their Friend in heaven, they boldly sung praises in the temple too. The temple was still God's house, as it had ever been ; it was only according to the natural course of things that it should have been transformed into the first *Christian cathedral*, had the entire Israelitish nation, chiefs and people, done homage to Him in whom the shadows and types of the temple were all fulfilled. *Now*, indeed, it was devoted to *destruction*. But as long as it stood, it was even to Christians a sacred spot which served to elevate their souls, and where, moreover, they might reckon upon meeting with souls susceptible of evangelical impressions. Most justly does the Lord attach high importance to a frank and decided confession of His name. Men may say what they please, but the absence of profession is an indication that Christianity has not yet been taken up in good sober earnest. But confession is something more than a Christian formula. It springs from a cheerful impulse of the heart, and is based upon conviction, fixed as firm as a rock, and precisely hence is it an open and undaunted declaration of the colours and banners to which a man has sworn fidelity. It is the discovery of the sacred mark and seal which Christ has stamped on the forehead of all of us who are His disciples ; a discovery which a man, moreover, feels himself inwardly constrained



to make precisely there where silence is equivalent to acquiescence in worldly unbelief ; and where plain speaking is not insured against the danger of being retorted upon with scorn, derision, or with even worse than these. Shame upon that cowardly reticence and silence ! How frequently are Christians guilty of it, and how much does it serve to disgrace and cast obloquy upon our Lord's cause, with which they are identified ; and to what profound grief does it not bring those Christian brethren of whom they are the representatives !

And when, finally, it is said of the primitive Christians, that they "*did eat their meat with gladness and with singleness of heart,*" we thereby get a glimpse of their *prevailing tone of mind*. Free from every trace of constrained and painful asceticism, and without the gloom of conventual life, they were truly cheerful, bright, and inoffensively joyous folk. And how could they well have been otherwise, they who knew, that through the blood of Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit, they had a *conscience void of offence* before God and all the world, and that they were children of their heavenly Father's family, for the present travelling together to the Jerusalem above ? There was nothing artificial, nothing forced or affected about them, but everything bore the stamp of originality and truth. Never hesitating as to their line of action, and ever exercising that tact which is the gift of the Holy Spirit, they uniformly chose the right, and thereby proved themselves to belong to the "*righteous,*" for whom there is "*no law given,*" because the law of God is engraven upon their hearts. And though, in contemplation of their heavenly inheritance, there was not one of them but could say with the apostle in reference to earthly things, "*I have learnt in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content, and am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*" Nevertheless,



the least temporal advantage with which they saw themselves blest, sufficed to animate them with innocent, child-like joy, because they recognised in it a renewed mark of God's favour, who had taken upon Himself to provide for their wants, both of soul and body, and who kept the very hairs of their heads numbered. And hence it was that at table they praised God, "*and did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,*" no longer tormented with scruples as to what was permitted, and what not; moreover, they felt themselves to be in the temple of the Lord, not only upon Mount Moriah, but likewise in their dwellings and houses, and everywhere else.

Such, my friends, were the characteristics of the first Christian Church. You will admit that if it had but spread itself over the whole world, there would have been no prisons, no workhouses, no courts of justice, or similar institutions upon earth. The steel of our swords would have been wrought into ploughshares, and the metal of our cannon would have been converted into church-bells. Goodness and truth would everywhere have embraced each other, and righteousness and peace would have kissed each other.

II. It may readily be imagined that a church, the fundamental features of which were such as those which we have just depicted, must necessarily have shone forth with wondrous effect upon a world wholly estranged from the faith. It is said with reference to its members, that "*they had favour with all the people.*" This is saying much. It astonishes us. Modern believers have not been so happy in their experience. And why not? Much might be said in reply to this question; and in enumerating some of the reasons, I have to observe that the majority of men of the world regard evangelical professors with mistrust, because they find so many among them who are self-convicted of insincerity, and to be of those who hold indeed the word of



truth, but not the truth of the Word; for they assume the externals of Christianity but that they may please men, or out of respect to prevalent fashion, or from political interests, because Christianity is conservative, or out of affection to the party to which they stand pledged, and in whose programme the article of a positive faith is inscribed. Again, it is to be regretted, that of true believers, those are ever becoming more rare who are wholly what they seem, who know how to keep themselves clear of morbid developments, of morbid deformities of one kind or another,—such as a censorious spirit, haughty self-exaltation, a striving after empty honours flimsily masked with a feigned humility, affected unction, a mere sham, and occasionally untruthfulness. Were all believers, in their moral features, like those children of the Spirit at Jerusalem—if all they said and did breathed only humility and love—were their life but to preach the glory of the gospel practically as much as they do it orally,—then indeed *the respect of all* and *the love of many* would be fully assured to them likewise; and they would also serve, as did their prototypes there, not only as lighthouses to the disnasted and rudderless tempest-tossed vessels on the sea of life seeking a port of refuge, but they would be joyously hailed as beacons indicating the course to be followed, and, by the influence of sincere personal holiness, purely reflecting peace, they would exert irresistible powers of attraction for the morally noble, beautiful, and sublime. The effect wrought by their presence would assuredly be similar to that produced at Jerusalem, (where “*fear came upon every soul,*”) at which there is no ground for marvel; for, contemplating themselves in the mirror of such a regenerate race, they would feel terrified at the loss of their security, and they would inwardly feel themselves sentenced and condemned for their own personal alienation from God, and for their worldly-mindedness. But this would not pre-



vent the reoccurrence to believers of the very same experience which is reported of those who, baptized with the Spirit, were the first-fruits of the kingdom of Christ, viz., "*They had favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.*"

Would that the loving church of Pentecost, the beautiful conception of which we retain to this hour, might again somewhere present itself, that we, at least, might confidently affirm of some one spot upon earth, "There, if you desire to see it, you will find a church, exhibiting, in its carriage, genuine and living Christianity!" All that we can do, in the meanwhile, to satisfy the desire of those who cherish such a wish, is to select individual impersonations of it throughout the world, and to bring the latter as an imaginary body before them; but the time will come when it will be otherwise. The historic manifestation of the first Christian church was at once both prophetic type and Divine promise for the future. The prophecy of the seer Joel is as yet but in incipient accomplishment. Another Pentecost of all-absorbing proportions is in the distance. May this ardently-hoped-for time presently dawn upon this our night, when Immanuel shall begin to wield exclusive sovereignty upon earth, when Satan, bound, shall be committed to the abyss, and humanity shall form one fold under one Shepherd; and it shall be said, in perfect truth, to every Church, "In everything ye are enriched by Him; in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in love, so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Conqueror, conquer! Ruler, reign!  
King, assert Thy sovereign right,  
Till no slavery more remain!  
Spread the kingdom of Thy might!  
Lead the captives freely out,  
Through the covenant of Thy blood,



From our dark remorse and doubt,  
For Thou wilt but our good.

“Draw us to Thy cross, O Love!  
Crucify with Thee whate’er  
Cannot dwell with Thee above;  
Lead us to those regions fair.  
Courage! long the time may seem,  
Yet His day is coming fast!  
We shall be like them that dream  
When our freedom dawns at last.”

*Gottfried Arnold, 1696.—Lyra Germanica.*

THE END.



























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